

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS

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February 19, 2025

Start: 1:09 p.m.

Recess: 3:31 p.m.

HELD AT: 250 Broadway - Committee Room, 14th
Floor

B E F O R E: Robert F. Holden,
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Joanne Ariola
Kristy Marmorato
Sandy Nurse
Vickie Paladino

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

James Hendon
Commissioner for New York City Department of
Veterans' Services, DVS

Lamarr Wheeler
Senior Executive Director for Housing and Support
Services, DVS

Sonya Russell
Associate Commissioner for Adult Families,
Veterans, and Special Services, NYC Department of
Homeless Services, DHS

Francesca DiPaola
Homes for Veterans

Armando Crescenzi
Put Veterans First

Christopher Leon Johnson
Self

Tim Pena
Veterans Justice Project, The Forgotten Veteran

Joseph Bello
NY Metro Vets

Raul Rivera
Veteran

Melissa del Valle Ortiz
Veteran

Sharon Brown
Rose of Sharon Enterprises

Alex Stein
Self

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Jeanine Costley
Institute for Community Living

Ariane Ling
The Military Family Center, New York University
Langone Health

Michael Moreno
Vietnam Veterans of America, Chapter 126

Dierdre Rice-Reese
Samaritan Daytop Village

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2 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Testing, Testing, this is a
3 sound check for the Committee on Veterans recorded by
4 Sergeant Menlevy(SP?) on the 14th Floor of the
5 Committee Room on February 19, 2025.

6 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Good afternoon and welcome to
7 the New York City Council Hearing of the Committee on
8 Veterans. At this time, can everybody please silence
9 your cellphones? If you wish to testify, please go
10 to the back of the room to fill out a testimony slip
11 with the Sergeant at Arms. At this time and going
12 forward, no one is to approach the dais. I repeat,
13 no one is to approach the dais.

14 Chair, we are ready to begin.

15 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Thank you Sergeant. [GAVEL]
16 Good afternoon. I'm Council Member Robert Holden,
17 Chair of the Committee on Veterans. Welcome to our
18 Oversight hearing on addressing the needs of homeless
19 veterans. In addition to our oversight topic, we
20 will be hearing four bills, Intro. Number 465,
21 sponsored by Council Member Inna Vernikov requiring
22 the Department of Housing Preservation and
23 Development to submit reports on veteran preference
24 in Mitchell Lama developments.

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2 Also, Intro. 684, which I have sponsored,
3 requiring each Committee Board to establish a
4 Veterans Committee. Intro. 685, which I have also
5 sponsored, regarding procurement opportunities for
6 veteran owned business enterprises. And finally,
7 Intro. 1171, which I also sponsored, requiring a
8 study and recommendations of the feasibility of
9 implementing a pilot program to provide
10 Reconsolidation of Traumatic Memories, better known
11 as RTM therapy for veterans. It's been very
12 successful in its trials and it's very inexpensive,
13 which I'll mention in a little while.

14 But let me uh - did we get Council Member
15 Vernikov. Okay, we're going to hear from Council
16 Member Vernikov as soon as we get the feed on. Sorry
17 about that. Those of you who have attended other
18 hearings of this Committee and heard me speak about
19 two of my bills numerous times. First, the
20 importance of having each Community Board establish
21 its own Veterans Committee, so that the needs of
22 veterans can be heard and hopefully met in their
23 neighborhoods, in their home neighborhoods. And
24 second, the promising studies that show that RTM
25 therapy, which I just spoke about, can be much more,

1
2 less expensive and more effective way of treating
3 post-traumatic stress disorder in veterans than any
4 other method so far currently being used. And my
5 hope is that New York City can make RTM therapy more
6 available here if a pilot program shows that it
7 works.

8 The other bill would enable veteran owned
9 businesses to identify as such when registering to do
10 business with the City of New York. This bill would
11 also require a creation of a Veteran Leadership
12 Advisory program to educate veteran owned businesses
13 about city procurement opportunities and to support
14 those business during the procurement process.

15 I believe that this bill would provide some much
16 needed support for our veteran owned businesses. Let
17 me now turn to the hearing topic, which is a
18 universal concern. How do we make sure that veterans
19 who have served our country have given back but are
20 now left homeless as a result? We are both saddened
21 and truly dismayed at the thought of veterans living
22 on the streets, in shelters, or in temporary housing
23 that most of the time is inadequate and we fear for
24 their physical and mental health and their economic
25

1
2 outcomes as they try to find stability in their
3 lives.

4 Witnesses at this Committees hearing in the past
5 have testified about conditions in at least one
6 housing shelter in New York City that is dedicated to
7 veterans and about the difficulty they have in
8 getting services and the need to survive and thrive
9 in that atmosphere.

10 Today, we want to understand the exact size of
11 New York City's homeless veteran population. The
12 ways that our city addresses their needs and how we
13 can improve and that's what this hearing is about.
14 How do we improve for the better these services and
15 make them accessible to veterans? Nothing is more
16 important to this Committee.

17 At this time, I would like to acknowledge my
18 colleagues who are here, Kristy Marmorato Council
19 Member, Council Member Vickie Paladino, and Council
20 Member Sandy Nurse. And I know Joann Ariola is on
21 her way.

22 So, I'd also like to thank the Committee Staff
23 who prepared for this hearing, the great John LaRosa,
24 our Legislative Counsel who this is our last meeting,
25

1
2 hearing with you so uhm, he's moving on to bigger and
3 better things, so we're going to miss him.

4 So, we're going to work you today and I want to
5 thank Regina Paul, our Policy Analyst who is not
6 going anywhere. She better not. Ross Goldstein, our
7 Financial Analyst and finally, thanks to Daniel
8 Kurzyna, my Chief of Staff who is somewhere in the
9 back and my Legislative Director William Dougherty
10 somewhere in the back there too and they've been
11 doing great work behind the scenes and again, I want
12 to thank them.

13 I would now turn it over to our Legislative
14 Counsel to administer the oath to witnesses from the
15 Administration.

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Please raise your right hand.
17 Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth, and
18 nothing but the truth in your testimony before the
19 Committee and to respond honestly to Council Members
20 questions?

21 PANEL: I do.

22 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. As a reminder to
23 all of our witnesses, please state your name prior to
24 your testimony for the record.

1
2 JAMES HENDON: Good morning. James Hendon,
3 Commissioner of New York City Department of Veterans'
4 Services. Good morning Chair Holden or good
5 afternoon Chair, members of the Committee and
6 advocates. My name is James Hendon, I serve as
7 Commissioner of the New York City Department of
8 Veterans' Services. Thank you for holding this
9 hearing on meeting the needs of New York City's
10 homeless veterans. I'm joined today by my colleagues
11 Lamarr Wheeler, Senior Executive Director for Housing
12 and Support Services and Sonya Russell, Associate
13 Commissioner for Adult Families, Veterans and Special
14 Services for the New York City Department of Homeless
15 Services.

16 Thank you for providing us with the opportunity
17 to discuss DVS's efforts in partnership with our
18 fellow city, state and federal partners to address
19 veteran homelessness in the five boroughs. Following
20 my testimony, we welcome any questions the Committee
21 Members may have. Veteran homelessness is one of the
22 most critical issues that DVS engages. It was a
23 central focus before DVS was established as a
24 department dating back to when our agency initially
25 served as the Mayor's Office of Veterans' Affairs.

1
2 In June of 2014, former First Lady Michelle Obama
3 announced the federal governments Mayor's Challenge
4 to End Veteran Homelessness. The Mayor's Challenge
5 was an effort that the City of New York immediately
6 joined. Since accepting the challenge more than ten
7 years ago, the City of New York, including entities
8 like DVS and the Department of Social Services have
9 made remarkable progress in significantly reducing
10 the population of veterans and veteran families who
11 are housing insecure.

12 As highlighted in a report by the New York State
13 Comptroller, New York saw an 83 percent decline in
14 the number of homeless veterans from 2010 to 2022.
15 The Comptroller's analysis found that 90 percent of
16 the 83 percent reduction came from the work occurring
17 here in New York City. The reduction in the city's
18 veteran homeless community is a remarkable
19 achievement largely credited to increased federal
20 funding are successful collaboration with the New
21 York City Housing Authority, New York City Department
22 of Social Services, New York City Department of
23 Housing and Preservation Development, US Department
24 of Housing and Urban Development and the US
25 Department of Veterans Affairs.

1 Assisting veterans who are experiencing
2
3 homelessness is one of the foundational pillars of
4 this agency. Since our Housing and Support Services
5 program was established in 2016, DVS has assisted
6 more than 1,400 veterans with their moves into
7 permanent or supportive housing. We have staff who
8 are specifically dedicated to HSS known as Veteran
9 Housing Coordinators. DVS's Veteran Housing
10 Coordinators serve as high touch navigators ensuring
11 the veterans have a trusted, informed individual
12 standing by their side as they traverse the housing
13 process. Coordinators make sure that veterans have
14 everything they need including but not limited to
15 providing support to help veterans assess and prepare
16 for viable housing options. Engaging on behalf of
17 veterans with landlords and management companies,
18 transporting veterans to and from apartment viewings,
19 housing application assistance, broker landlord
20 introductions, unit inspection assistance,
21 facilitating one shot deal requests, connecting
22 recently housed veterans with furniture and aftercare
23 and eviction prevention support.

24 Our goals are to help veterans understand the
25 benefits that they are eligible for, connect them to

1
2 desired benefits, identify a housing opportunity that
3 is an appropriate fit and ensure that those whom we
4 assist do not revert backwards in their housing
5 journey. Our team leverages existing subsidy
6 programs, the community resources to match veterans
7 to the right level of care and support that they
8 need. At the federal level, DVS leverages programs
9 such as the federally funded Housing Urban
10 Development Via Supportive Housing program, HUDVSH
11 and the Supportive Services Veteran Families Program
12 SSVF.

13 At the state level, we promote the Veterans
14 Emergency Housing Assistance Fund, specific to New
15 York City, DVS embraces local subsidies, like Special
16 One Time Assistance, SOTA. City fighting
17 homelessness and eviction prevention support City
18 FHEPS and various forms of supportive housing to
19 provide our constituents with an array of dwelling
20 options. One of the most impactful partnerships
21 administered in New York City is HUDVSH Collaborative
22 Case Management or HUDVSH CCM, formally known as
23 HUDVSH Continuum. This subsidy program enables
24 veterans who were not eligible for VA healthcare a
25 prerequisite for HUDVSH. To receive a special HUDVSH

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2 voucher so long as DVS, not the VA provides social
3 services and case management support.

4 DVS estimates that in a given year, approximately
5 40 percent of our homeless veterans are not eligible
6 for VA healthcare. As a result, the best path
7 available to them often is to receive a HUDVSH CCM
8 voucher. DVS first piloted the HUDVSH CCM program
9 with the New York City Housing Authority in 2017.
10 NYCHA, on behalf of HUD, provides the housing choice
11 section 8 voucher type of the program. DVS acting in
12 place of the VA delivers pre- moveout, transitional
13 and aftercare eviction prevention services. DVS's
14 efforts and support of a federal program delivering
15 services that the VA will not provide amounts to a
16 federal unfunded mandate.

17 Since HUDVSH CCM started eight years ago, DVS has
18 helped more than 300 veterans take advantage of this
19 subsidy. Our veteran housing coordinators delivered
20 thoughtful and comprehensive case management to those
21 whom we assist during each step that they take.
22 Beyond the coordination that occurs from an
23 introduction through moveout from shelter where
24 applicable, all veterans housed by DVS have access to
25 aftercare follow up.

1
2 Aftercare ensures that veterans are connected to
3 key services at all times with a special emphasis on
4 periods of transition and recovery. Aftercare
5 services include critical time interventions during
6 which DVS checks in on those whom we have housed.
7 Critical time interventions are performed during the
8 following periods after moveout, six months, eleven
9 months, eighteen months, twenty-four months, and
10 thirty-six months.

11 A CTI, Critical Time Intervention, may result in
12 internal referrals to DVS and or external referrals
13 to community partners who provide mental health,
14 employment and other enabling resources. In
15 coordination with DHS, DVS when needed also works
16 with SSVF funded entities to place veterans into
17 local veteran specific supportive housing sites.
18 These organizations include: Help USA, The Jericho
19 Project, services for the underserved and Volunteers
20 of America. It is critical to understand the
21 jurisdictional differences between DVS, DSS, and the
22 agencies within DSS, the New York City Department of
23 Homeless Services and the Human Resources
24 Administration DHS and HRA as it pertains to
25 addressing veteran homelessness.

1
2 DHS under DSS manages the city's overall homeless
3 shelter network which includes more than 450 shelters
4 in transitional housing facilities for those
5 experiencing housing insecurity. The DHS portfolio
6 includes emergency shelter intake, case management
7 and rehousing initiatives for the general population.
8 Conversely, DVS does not directly operate homeless
9 shelters, rather DVS serves as the primary agency
10 coordinating services tailored specifically to
11 veterans with an emphasis on those who are not
12 eligible for VA healthcare. DHS in partnership with
13 the VA takes the lead with most veterans who are
14 eligible for VA healthcare. We at DVS stand on the
15 last line of defense for our brothers and sisters
16 when many other programs, benefits, and organizations
17 are not available. A notable distinction is the
18 Borden Avenue Veterans Residents. The only dedicated
19 homeless shelter for veterans in New York City. The
20 Borden Avenue Residents provides the veterans with
21 specific supportive services such as benefits
22 navigation, peer mentorship and pathways to permanent
23 supportive housing that are tailored to the unique
24 needs of US military service members. Out of the 225
25 beds in Borden, all of which are enclosed in their

1
2 own private pods, thanks to leadership from the
3 Veterans Committee and DHS, one of the 54 beds is
4 subsidized by the VA while the 71 beds are subsidized
5 by the city.

6 While all other homeless shelters in the city are
7 managed by DHS, DVS plays a crucial role in ensuring
8 that veterans in these facilities receive the
9 specialized care and housing services that they need.

10 DVS works alongside DSS and DHS to connect veterans
11 experiencing homelessness with available housing
12 subsidies, supportive housing programs and via
13 resources. Additionally, HRA, another division
14 within DSS, administers key benefits programs such as
15 public assistance, rental assistance, and healthcare
16 support.

17 DVS bridges the gap between our clients and DSS's
18 offerings by ensuring that veterans can navigate
19 these resources but also recommending targeted
20 actions and policies that address their unique
21 circumstances.

22 In summary, while DHS and HRA oversee the city's
23 broader homeless services and benefit programs, DVS
24 ensures that veterans receive the tailored support
25 they deserve.

1
2 As we continue to address - as we continue our
3 efforts to address veteran homelessness, it is
4 critical to acknowledge the larger trends influencing
5 the homeless veteran population in New York City.
6 Several key factors contribute to the ongoing
7 challenges we face, including the migration of out of
8 state veterans seeking support from New York City,
9 the introduction of new federal tools, like the
10 Status Query and Response Exchange System, squares
11 and evolving housing and economic conditions.

12 New York City has long been recognized for its
13 robust social safety net and veterans specific
14 support services, making it an attractive destination
15 for veterans experiencing homeless from across the
16 nation. Unlike many other states, New York City
17 offers a more comprehensive range of benefits
18 including mental assistance, healthcare access, food
19 security programs, and legal services, many of which
20 are accessible regardless of prior residency.

21 Additionally, the availability of veterans
22 specific housing programs such as HUDVSH AND City
23 FHEPS, combined with strong local partnerships
24 between city agencies and veteran service
25 organizations has made the city a national leader in

1
2 veteran homelessness reduction efforts. However,
3 this reputation also presents unique challenges as we
4 a growing trend of veterans from out of the state
5 arriving in New York City specifically to seek these
6 resources.

7 Many of these individuals are ineligible for
8 federal VA benefits due to discharge status, length
9 of service or other criteria making them more reliant
10 on city and state level assistance programs. This
11 influx of new veterans places additional strain on
12 our homeless shelter system, case management
13 resources and housing subsidies, underscoring the
14 need for increased funding and interagency
15 coordination, to ensure that all veterans regardless
16 of where they come from receive the support they need
17 to achieve housing stability.

18 It is important to note that New York City
19 proudly has the most liberal definition of a veteran
20 in the country. A person who have served in the
21 armed forces is a veteran in the eyes of the City of
22 New York regardless of their length of service,
23 component of service, or active duty guard reserve
24 and character of discharge. Putting this all
25 together, the DVS housing support services team

1
2 estimates that each year roughly 35 percent of the
3 veterans we serve did not live in New York City one
4 year prior to becoming homeless. A sizable
5 population elected to move here after housing
6 insecurity was on the horizon. And to repeat
7 something that was already mentioned, 40 percent of
8 all homeless veterans in New York City are not
9 eligible for VA healthcare.

10 One of the most significant advancements in
11 veteran homelessness intervention has been the
12 integration of the VA's Status Query Response
13 Exchange System or SQUARES and of the workflow of
14 DHS. SQUARES is a web-based application that allows
15 VA employees in external organizations, including
16 Homeless Services Providers, Law Enforcement agencies
17 and local, state and federal agencies to screen a
18 list of clients in order to identify those clients
19 who are veterans. SQUARES also relays identified
20 veterans eligibility for VA healthcare. Through
21 SQUARES, DHS intake centers can now quickly and
22 accurately identify whether a homeless individual is
23 a veteran, enabling faster connections to VA
24 benefits, healthcare and housing support programs.
25 The system works by allowing users to submit identity

1 attributes, such as name, date of birth, Social
2 Security number and gender, and receive real time
3 information regarding the individuals VA eligibility.
4 This streamline process ensures that veterans are not
5 mistakenly classified as non-Veterans, which in the
6 past, led to delays in accessing critical resources.

7
8 The introduction of SQUARES and the DHS workflow
9 represents a major step forward in ensuring that
10 every veteran who interacts with New York City
11 shelter system is properly identified and connected
12 to available federal and local resources. However,
13 ongoing training and system improvements are
14 necessary to maximize its effectiveness, particularly
15 in cases where veterans are ineligible for VA
16 services and must rely on city and state programs.

17 As we look to the future, it is crucial that we
18 continue refining on intake and identification
19 processes, expand our capacity to serve out of state
20 veterans and champion sustained funding from all
21 sources to meet the growing demand for veteran
22 specific homelessness support.

23 By addressing these larger trends with strategic
24 planning and interagency collaboration, we can build
25 upon our successes and ensure that New York City

1
2 remains a leader in providing housing stability and
3 care for all veterans in need.

4 The number of veterans in New York City shelter
5 system has declined by more than 85 percent over the
6 past 13 years, from 4,677 in 2011 to 624 in 2024,
7 three of whom were street homeless according to the
8 2024 point and time count.

9 With that being said, reaching a goal of
10 functional zero, that is 400 or fewer veterans in the
11 shelter system has been allusive. The combination of
12 housing insecure veterans from across America coming
13 into New York City, coupled with the fact that what
14 remains of what was almost 5,000 homeless veterans
15 more than a decade ago, is a group that is
16 disproportionately complex cases. This makes the
17 work vital. We will reach and maintain a count lower
18 than 400 in the future. It will be hard.

19 This is an all hands on deck situation. Three
20 suggestions for how the City Council can help us get
21 there: Discretionary funding, provide discretionary
22 funding for nonprofits that do work with veterans who
23 are justice involved. I'm speaking of those in
24 veterans treatment court; specifically mentorship
25 organization for veteran treatment court

1
2 participants; groups that visit veterans who are
3 detained at the veterans wing at Rikers Correctional
4 facility; nonprofits that serve veterans who are on
5 parole; and groups that work with New York City
6 veterans who were recently released from
7 incarceration.

8 The next is between those who are justice
9 involved and those experiencing housing insecurity is
10 real. We pray that the City Council can help those
11 organizations that are committed to providing this
12 assistance.

13 Local Law 37 questions: Ask the Local Law 37 of
14 2024 questions on your constituent intake forms in
15 your district offices. These questions are voluntary
16 and they are to paraphrase: Have you or any member
17 of your household served in the Armed Forces,
18 National Guard or Reserve in the United States? Next
19 question, do you consent to the NYC Department of
20 Veteran Services contacting you regarding services
21 and resources for veterans?

22 In a city where only 24.1 percent of all veterans
23 self-identify, we cannot help veterans combat housing
24 insecurity when we do not know who they are.

25 Further, a critical aspect of this work is reaching a

1
2 veteran and veteran families to prevent them from
3 becoming housing insecure in the first place. In
4 addition to including these questions in your intake
5 forms, I humbly beg you to ask other social services
6 entities in your networks to do the same thing. DVS
7 is engaging social service entities about this as
8 well.

9 Success is if all groups that provide social
10 services of any nature, elected officials, agencies,
11 community benefit organizations etc., as these
12 questions. Use VA SQUARES, SQUARES, which once again
13 stands for Status Query and Response Exchange System
14 could be found online at va.gov/homeless/squares.
15 Once again, it's va.gov/homeless/squares, is a VA web
16 application that allows public and nonprofit social
17 service providers to screen all adult clients for
18 veteran status and VA healthcare eligibility.

19 After being granted access, an organization can
20 either input a clients information individually or
21 bulk upload the information from an Excell file. The
22 VA tool, which captures information, it is a pass
23 through then relays which clients on the list are
24 veterans and whether they are eligible for VA
25 healthcare. Once you learn whether that client is a

1
2 veteran, it is your discretion how you engage that
3 individual. Over the past two and a half years we've
4 worked with DHS that they've rolled out using
5 SQUARES, we've learned that for every shelter client
6 who tells DHS they are a veteran, one does not. This
7 is a contributory reason to the uptick in the veteran
8 point and time count in 2023, which is 567 veterans
9 to 2024, 624 veterans. As our efforts slowly advance
10 from crawl to walk to run. The uptick is something
11 I'm not happy about. We don't want any homeless
12 veterans in New York City, America or the world that
13 said I am happy along with our DHS colleagues to have
14 a stronger handle on exactly who our homeless veteran
15 population are.

16 We are the first major city in America to do
17 this. Screening all adult shelter clients for
18 veteran status. I give eternal credit to the DHS
19 Assistant Commissioner Sonya Russell, DHS
20 Administrator Joslyn Carter, and DSS Commissioner
21 Molly Wasow Park for making this decision. I
22 encourage you and all social service providers to do
23 the same.

24 Who knows how many veteran or military families
25 you've already served in the past? You just didn't

1 know it. Once you do know, you will be surprised at
2 how many of our brothers and sisters come into the
3 light when you simply talk to them and address it.
4 Once again the website for VA SQUARES is
5 va.gov/homeless/squares. DVS is happy to advise any
6 City Council member, government agency or nonprofit
7 social service provider looking to leverage this
8 asset.
9

10 In conclusion, the commitment by New York City to
11 combat veteran homelessness through collaborative
12 efforts with local, state, federal resources is
13 essential for providing stable housing, supportive
14 services and ensuring the wellbeing of veterans who
15 have served the nation. We recognize that the path
16 to achieving this success lays in fostering effective
17 communication and synergy amongst all stakeholders,
18 city, state and federal, public, private and
19 nonprofit.

20 Furthermore, by working collaboratively and
21 transparently, we can ensure that our city thrives,
22 prospers and provides a brighter future for all who
23 call it home, especially our veterans and their
24 families. Together we can overcome challenges, seize
25 opportunities and build a stronger, more resilient

1
2 and inclusive New York City that benefits every
3 member of our diverse and vibrant ecosystem. I urge
4 you all to please reach out to me or our Senior
5 Advisor for Intergovernmental Affairs Jason Loughran.
6 Please view us as a tool to help navigate your
7 legislative ideas and act as an optimizer to historic
8 and future success.

9 As a side, I'd like to remind all who hear these
10 remarks for the deadline to apply for City Council
11 discretionary is today, February 19th at 9:00 p.m.,
12 at 5:00 p.m. excuse me. February 19th at 5:00 p.m..
13 Please visit nyc.gov/vetcouncilfunding to learn more.
14 Nyc.gov/vetcouncilfunding.

15 Separately, the deadline to apply to join ones
16 Community Board, for those of you in Manhattan it's
17 February 28th. Deadline for those who live in the
18 Bronx is March 9th. There is no deadline for Staten
19 Island residents applications join Richmond County
20 Community Boards are rolling. The deadline to apply
21 to join Community Boards in Queens and Brooklyn this
22 year has already passed. It was on February 14th.
23 Please visit nyc.gov/vetcommunityboards to learn
24 more. Nyc.gov/vetcommunityboards.

1
2 Lastly, the New York City Department of Veteran
3 Service can be reached by telephone at 212-416-5250.
4 It's 212-416-5250. Email at
5 connect@veterans.nyc.gov. It's
6 connect@veterans.nyc.gov. Via social media is
7 @nycveterans, it's @nycveterans and online it is
8 nyc.gov/vets, nyc.gov/vets. Thank you.

9 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Thank you Commissioner and
10 thank you for speed reading at this point. He's the
11 fastest reader on this side of the Mississippi but we
12 want to thank you again for your excellent and
13 thorough testimony. I want to just to turn it over
14 to Inna Vernikov, Council Member Inna Kov- uhm,
15 Vernikov, I'm sorry. That was a good one. Inna
16 Vernikov will talk about Intro. 465, her Intro.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER VERNIKOV: Can you hear me?

18 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: I got you.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER VERNIKOV: Hi, good afternoon
20 everyone. Thank you Chair. Before I talk about my
21 bill, I'd just like to quickly acknowledge my
22 Legislative Director Troy Olson, who is a veteran and
23 served our country Afghanistan with honors. So, I
24 just want to thank him for his service. Thank you
25 Troy.

1
2 It is great to see Introduction 465 before this
3 Committee today. Intro. 465 would require HPD to
4 submit reports on veteran preference in Mitchell Lama
5 developments. The rationale of this bill is simple.
6 This is a great resource already in place for those
7 who have served our country and too many are missing
8 out on it. New York City is home to more than
9 100,000 veterans including over 30,000 in the borough
10 of Brooklyn. Our veterans are as diverse as the city
11 they lived out in. The veterans preference and
12 Mitchell Lama waiting list for housing is one of the
13 great tools we have to not only combat veterans
14 homelessness but also do so in a way that is
15 permanent, affordable and sustainable and keeps
16 veterans in our city at a time when the cost of
17 living is far too high.

18 Yet all too often, the veteran preference falls
19 by the wayside. At a recent hearing of this
20 Committee, Commissioner Hendon said that the top
21 issue facing the city's veterans is not self-
22 identifying as a veteran. For instance, a 2012
23 report by the Office of the State Comptroller
24 reviewed 18 sampled Mitchell Lama housing
25 developments with open waiting lists. These

1
2 developments fill 332 vacancies but only 14 of them,
3 which were filled by a veteran. Those findings also
4 found that veterans were passed over for vacancies at
5 some locations including two developments in
6 Manhattan. One of which has no closed their list
7 entirely as of early 2024. This is very unfortunate.
8 Both the city and veterans residing in our five
9 boroughs are missing out on this and we need to do a
10 better job of ensuring this preference is known about
11 and that there's accountability on these list
12 ensuring that veterans preference is actually taking
13 place on selections.

14 I'd like to thank Chairman Holden and the
15 Committee for hearing this bill and discussing
16 veterans housing and homelessness today and I ask
17 that my colleagues sign on to Intro. 465. Thank you
18 very much.

19 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Thank you. Thank you
20 Council Member. I just want to turn it over to
21 Council Member Nurse who has another engagement and
22 has to leave, so we're going to put her on first.
23 Thank you. She has some questions.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Thank you Chair and I
25 appreciate the option to bump up earlier. I'm sorry

1
2 I can't attend the whole hearing; I have a previous
3 standing commitment. One, I just want to commend you
4 for what you laid out in your speech and the work
5 that you all are doing. I am a little concerned
6 about what's happening at the federal level and the
7 lack of clarity and confusion and chaos that is being
8 directed towards the VA. And as a daughter of
9 veterans and having multiple family members who rely
10 on the VA, I'm very concerned about that. We should
11 be very clear and consistent with our veterans that
12 they're going to be supported both in their medical
13 services and also in their housing.

14 I wanted to ask about what your interaction is
15 with other agencies regarding supportive housing
16 units because there are hundreds that are sitting
17 vacant and I know that you all aren't running and
18 managing housing but what are the communications
19 about trying to get some of our homeless veterans
20 into some of these units? And are you all at all
21 helping veterans fill out the 2010 E-Form? Are you
22 helping the folks fill out these applications?

23 JAMES HENDON: Thank you so much for that
24 question Council Member. Once again, thank you for
25 being in here as a family member, as a military

1 family. We appreciate you for that. I'll start a
2 little bit and defer to you know Sonya for more of
3 this. We do work with folks as far as the 2010 E.
4 That's one thing. One of the biggest issues with us
5 is we went from having roughly 5,000 so just under
6 5,000 homeless veterans to now it's just over 600.
7 Right now we're dealing with a group where we have
8 folks with some serious complex needs and there's
9 reluctance often to move from emergency into
10 supportive. And so, what we're working on is to make
11 sure folks can see the entire pathway.
12

13 In other words, it's not just you go into support
14 them, you just stay there. It's if you see yourself
15 getting too affordable, getting to ownership, we want
16 to be able to cast that light, to be able to show
17 them what the paths are. Right now we list things at
18 you know nyc.gov/ [INAUDIBLE 00:30:20] but I'm so
19 happy that for us you know, we just onboarded two new
20 coordinators for housing just last month. And so,
21 that gives us the ability to have one coordinator to
22 take the additional duty on our affordable housing
23 slash ownership person. And so, what we're saying to
24 ourselves is we can message to our veterans in
25 shelter, hey look, you know don't think of it as just

1
2 supportive housing the way you typically think of it.
3 This is step one housing. Then make sure we've been
4 with you every step of the way for emergency housing
5 where you are right now step zero.

6 Supportive housing is step one. Here's how we
7 can stand with you for affordable and stand with you
8 for ownership. I personally feel and I'm going to
9 refer to Sonya to add a little more to this. One of
10 the key issues is, if I don't see what the long goal
11 is, why do I have to stay here? We want to break
12 that. We really want to show folks no look, we're
13 with you every step of the way and here's what we do
14 now in an emergency but here's how we can be with you
15 and supportive but to make sure that you are good to
16 go to do all the things that you need to do to be
17 able to be right in affordable and right and
18 ownership.

19 So, that's - I think that's what we're driving
20 for right now.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Yeah and there are
22 developments that now have both supportive and you
23 know mixed market and other non-supportive affordable
24 units that will work with people in supportive to
25 transition them over into the existing building so

1
2 they don't have to move far so you know ownership
3 might not be attainable for everyone but there are
4 opportunities to move out of supportive housing and
5 some supportive housing is really, really nice. I
6 mean very nice looking, and because of these folks
7 having a complex range of issues, supportive housing
8 can be a long term place that is viable and we should
9 work to destigmatize that a bit. But I appreciate
10 your time, thank you and thank you Chair.

11 JAMES HENDON: One other thing real quick.

12 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Yeah.

13 JAMES HENDON: The secret sauce of this team is
14 the high touch navigator support. That's really it
15 and so we already have strong touches with those we
16 assist and so now it's us saying okay look, we can be
17 there with you in this high touch way, not just for
18 emergency and for supportive but we got you for these
19 others and we think that that can help. Just that
20 trust, that bond. I just wanted to say that.

21 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Alright thanks Commissioner.

22 We've been joined by Council Member Joann Ariola.

23 Let me just get into some questions and you know just
24 talking about supportive housing. Last time we
25 visited it was last year; we visited a location of

1
2 supportive housing in the Bronx and surprisingly they
3 had some vacancies. So, you know we walked into some
4 empty apartments and they're small apartments but
5 they're nice. It's a nice neighborhood. There's a
6 good sense of neighborhood around that shelter, so it
7 was surprising that they were saying look, we have
8 vacancies. It's the next step of affordable housing,
9 transitional housing, that's a weak link here. So,
10 you know the associate commissioner I could ask like
11 how do we you know what's the weakest link in this
12 chain because we heard and I know if it's all over
13 the city but supportive housing there are vacancies.
14 Do you agree with that or are you hearing that?

15 SONYA RUSSELL: Yes, I do agree. Let me just
16 introduce myself again. Associate Commissioner Sonya
17 Russell, so thank you Chairman Holden. I do agree
18 with you. However, with respect to the veterans, we
19 have realized or we have data that supports that our
20 veterans do move out with supportive housing. It is
21 the number two most housing that our veterans will
22 exit shelter with. So, for Fiscal Year 2024, we had
23 over 122 veterans move out into supportive housing.
24 So that is at least 20 less than those that moved
25 out.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Are they getting their own
3 places or how does this work? After they move out of
4 supportive, where are they going?

5 SONYA RUSSELL: So we don't track specifically
6 where they go once they leave supportive housing but
7 we do focus on ensuring that they leave shelter by
8 way of supportive housing or City FHEPS or what's
9 most appropriate to them.

10 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: So, just to follow up on
11 that. So, there's no - you don't have an exit form
12 where you say you're leaving our supportive housing.
13 Can we find out where you're going so we can keep in
14 touch with you to see how you're doing? You don't
15 have that form?

16 SONYA RUSSELL: So, because DHS does not oversee
17 supportive housing, those are with providers, we
18 don't track our veterans once they move.

19 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: But maybe we should. Maybe
20 we should. That's a suggestion that possibly we'd be
21 able to track if they're doing well or if they're
22 not. Sometimes they stay - obviously they stay in
23 New York City sometimes, maybe most of the time.
24 It's just that how did they find housing? You know
25

1
2 what - did you help? Did the providers help? It's
3 probably all of the above.

4 SONYA RUSSELL: Yes, we do as Council Member
5 Nurse mentioned, uhm our providers do assist our
6 veterans by having them complete the CAP survey,
7 which is the Coordinated Assessment Placement. So,
8 once the CAP survey is completed, if a client - if a
9 veteran is eligible for supportive housing services,
10 we do complete that on behalf of the client which
11 enables them to move into supportive housing. And
12 for the agencies veterans services unit, in which I
13 oversee, we do send out mailings to the veterans that
14 give them an opportunity in which to connect back to
15 us if they need to. We give them information from
16 DVS. So, we want to ensure that they remain in their
17 current living situation but with respect to tracking
18 them as you have mentioned, that's something that we
19 can definitely take into consideration with our
20 Commissioner.

21 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Yeah, there should be some
22 kind chain where we could you know - even DVS having
23 that information because we do have a communications
24 problem you know especially with veterans and we owe
25 it to them to do the best we can on it.

1
2 SONYA RUSSELL: But understand supportive housing
3 is a level of permanent housing. So, I mean, it's
4 just housing that has wraparound services or support
5 services on site for those who need it. Specifically
6 when someone enters into a supportive housing unit,
7 it's primarily because they need additional services.
8 So, if we find veterans who would benefit from
9 perhaps mental health or substance abuse, supportive
10 housing is a great avenue for them to exit because
11 they still have that level of coordinated care or
12 case management that will enable them to not return
13 back into the shelter system but rather remain at the
14 supportive housing.

15 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Right but each veteran that
16 spoke to said they want to move on from that. You
17 know they have that urge to just get a larger place
18 because many times it's very small and they have
19 certain rules obviously. They don't feel like
20 they're independent, so if they graduate and they're
21 ready, let's say they've been there a year or so and
22 they want to move on. Most people would want that.
23 They want to feel like they're on their own.

24 SONYA RUSSELL: Absolutely.

25

1
2 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: So, I think that's uh - but
3 uhm, and by the way the forms that let's say for
4 homeless people, you know they have to go to your
5 office right to apply for shelter? They can't do it
6 online.

7 SONYA RUSSELL: I'm sorry, are you referring to
8 CAPS?

9 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Yes.

10 SONYA RUSSELL: So CAPS is not only specific at
11 Department of Homeless Services with our providers,
12 but other entities and organizations such as
13 hospitals and other city agencies have the ability to
14 assist clients with CAPS. So, it's not only, you
15 don't only have to have it completed when you're in
16 shelter, you can have community based organizations
17 also assist with that but we primarily use it at our
18 shelters to assist our clients.

19 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: But we try to look out
20 online in getting the form and we couldn't. So it
21 says you have to go to uh Department of you know DSS
22 or go somewhere. Like, it's probably more - it's
23 very difficult if you're disabled or have issues in
24 transportation. So, there's no form that I could get
25 online.

1
2 SONYA RUSSELL: I would have to get back to you
3 sir. I'm not certain but that's definitely something
4 -

5 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Yeah, and on any form, does
6 it have a little box for veterans?

7 SONYA RUSSELL: That's a great question. It
8 might but again, let me get back to you on that.

9 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Can you see if we can get
10 that in there?

11 SONYA RUSSELL: If not, then we can definitely
12 look at that.

13 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Yeah, you can change yours,
14 put a little box, are you a veteran? Because this is
15 a very important issue for this Committee and
16 especially with only 24 percent self-identifying.
17 Veterans that self-identify; we need a lot of work on
18 that.

19 SONYA RUSSELL: Absolutely.

20 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: And so, that's why some of
21 these bills aim to do that especially Community
22 Board, you know trying to get a veterans committee on
23 the Community Board because then we can find out
24 where they are because if we only know where 24

1
2 percent of veterans are or at least are here, we
3 don't really have an accurate picture.

4 So, if you can look at that and get back to me on
5 that because that's an important aspect.

6 SONYA RUSSELL: Yes sir, I can do that.

7 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Let me ask the Commissioner,
8 we want to talk about some of your uhm, you know how
9 does DVS track or engage with street homeless
10 veterans who may not be connected to services? I
11 mean obviously they're not, many times because they
12 are on a street. How does that work in terms of
13 working, you know coordinating with the Department of
14 Homeless Services or DSS with DVS?

15 LAMARR WHEELER: Good afternoon Chair. Let me
16 introduce myself again. I am the Executive Director
17 for Housing and Support Services for DVS. How we
18 interact and coordinate with DHS in regards to street
19 homeless veterans, we have deployed to where their
20 locations are, made verification that they were
21 veterans through this SQUARE system. It's very
22 handy.

23 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: So, Social Services contacts
24 you or you'll check in with them periodically?

1
2 LAMARR WHEELER: It can happen at different
3 levels. Street outreach can contact us directly or a
4 citizen contacts us and says I saw a veteran in the
5 subway. If we had the first contact with that
6 individual, we advise DHS.

7 JAMES HENDON: What has to be said here Mr. Chair
8 is you have some bad actors out here who present
9 themselves as a veteran and they turn out to not be.
10 I just want to call that out. So sometimes, you know
11 look, even at our point and time counting numbers,
12 only three of the 624 from that point and time count
13 were street homeless and in prior use we had less
14 than 10 of them in past over years of street homeless
15 in a given year. So, there are times when you have
16 someone who someone on the street and they see this
17 person and they say they're a veteran, you still have
18 to drill down and you realize no, this is just
19 someone saying that for whatever reason. I just want
20 to call that out.

21 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Yeah but we're at a bout
22 sometimes with somebody who would approach them and
23 just ask. They might be wearing a veteran hat or
24 they might you know, anything that can identify them
25 is important so we get them off the streets and into

1
2 some services. So, you know given the many local,
3 state and federal programs available, how does DVS
4 help veterans choose the most appropriate housing or
5 service option?

6 LAMARR WHEELER: We do that by assessment. We
7 assess the situation. We look at their active duty
8 service. We take a look at the current needs that
9 they are either stating or based on the information
10 we're able to obtain about maybe some of their
11 conditions that exist.

12 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Is this done mostly on the
13 phone or do you interview them in person?

14 LAMARR WHEELER: We interview them in person,
15 it's an in person.

16 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: You do an in person and you
17 talk to them and you find out you know - how do you
18 evaluate let's say you know they're talking to you.
19 You might say well, "I think you need to see a
20 doctor." I mean, obviously there's - you have to
21 look at the services they need and many times
22 especially if somebody is living on the street, we
23 want to have a good medical checkup.

24 LAMARR WHEELER: It's not really apparent, you're
25 correct sir.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Alright.

3 LAMARR WHEELER: However, the individuals that
4 are in shelter that service is part of their process
5 in shelter, to make those determinations, those
6 assessments take place. There are social workers at
7 the sites. If it is an individual that we are not
8 certain about, we certainly would encourage that
9 individual in, just help them navigate that process.

10 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: So, if you find out like a
11 veteran didn't self-identify let's say initially and
12 then they've been in the shelter system throughout
13 and you find out they're a veteran, do you work on
14 the transfer with the Department of Social Services
15 to try to get them supportive housing or just in
16 Borden. Tell us how that works.

17 SONYA RUSSELL: If I may, so again I do want to
18 give credit to Commissioner Hendon for introducing us
19 to SQUARES because I do have to say since the
20 utilization of SQUARES, it has allowed us to identify
21 veterans throughout the shelter system. And
22 something that we encounter is that not all veterans,
23 for an array of reasons, might not self-identify as a
24 veteran. However, when we utilize SQUARES and we get
25 information that that individual is in fact a

1
2 veteran, it allows us to reach out that person and
3 let them know that we have information that indicates
4 that they are a veteran and we have services that are
5 specific to them and we want to encourage them to
6 take advantage of those services.

7 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Does that happen quite often
8 or do you have any numbers on that? How many you
9 found out were in the system and they shouldn't have
10 been in there. They've been in for years and they
11 should have been in supportive or better conditions
12 let's say?

13 SONYA RUSSELL: So, we recently started utilizing
14 SQUARES, I believe it was in 2023, so we have data.
15 Unfortunately, I would have to get back to you and
16 provide that data but we do have data that indicates
17 that clients have come into the system and not
18 identified as a veteran. And again, once we have the
19 information that identifies them as such, we outreach
20 that individual and we again, we explain to them the
21 services that we provide or that's available to them
22 as a veteran and we want to ensure that they take
23 advantage of all of that.

24 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Right, it's the same thing
25 with Veteran Treatment Courts. Many times the

1
2 veterans who have you know have a run in with the law
3 or you know they're incarcerated, many times they
4 don't know about Veteran Treatment Court. So, we
5 have to you know obviously DVS has to but we really
6 don't have that information and many times the police
7 or the DA's don't have it.

8 JAMES HENDON: I have to say this Mr. Chair and
9 Sonya; I'm going to put it on the table right now.
10 There are instances where DHS will reach out and
11 personally identify them through SQUARES. They
12 didn't know them otherwise and the person says, you
13 know thank you but it's okay. They don't want it, so
14 they want to stay in the shelter. That's a real -
15 that's a real thing.

16 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Yeah, we can't make them,
17 yeah I get it. I get it but it's really where if
18 they know that they'll get better treatment because
19 they are veterans.

20 SONYA RUSSELL: And we've had some that will you
21 know say yes, please change my status and I wish to
22 identify as a veteran. So we have more that say yes
23 than say no and again, it's the outreach that we do
24 to explain to them the benefits that's available to
25

1
2 them while they are at you know with New York City
3 Department of Homeless Services.

4 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Alright, let's talk about
5 Borden Avenue because we get, you know we visited
6 there a number of times. We have a connection there.
7 Certainly, by the way, Mayor Adams did, you know when
8 I reached out to them about the individual rooms for
9 the veterans there instead of being in the open in a
10 congregate setting. He invested, you know, through
11 DHS at that time, Commissioner Jenkins invested in
12 those cubicles or those rooms and that's helped. So,
13 I want to give credit to the Mayor because I reached
14 out to him. I photographed what I saw at the Borden
15 Avenue Veterans and he made it you know, within
16 months they were all set up. So, DHS gets credit but
17 certainly so does the Mayor, so I just want to put
18 that out there on the record.

19 So, we heard about conditions. You know every
20 time we go there, you know there's complaints. We
21 know that there has been a slight upgrade in the
22 food. We want to get the kitchen fully operational.
23 We can get the - because I know I ran into a lot of
24 chefs, want to be chefs, who said, "look, I went to a
25 culinary school. I could cook. I would love to

1
2 practice and probably get a job as a chef in a
3 restaurant and it's my passion and we have a working
4 kitchen but I can't use it." I know there's classes
5 in there in Borden from time to time but I don't know
6 if we have a full operational - we should have a full
7 operational kitchen. I know the food has been
8 upgraded from those little plastic trays.

9 SONYA RUSSELL: Yes sir, correct.

10 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: So, now we get stainless
11 steel trays with hot food you know but it's brought
12 in.

13 SONYA RUSSELL: Yes, that is correct.

14 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: So, my goal before I leave
15 as Chair of this year, is to try to get that kitchen
16 operational and I know it's a budgetary item and
17 that's where we're going to be negotiating now but -
18 We've gotten complaints about the conditions there,
19 the cleanliness, the - I get veterans you know who
20 tell me that this person shouldn't in there. That
21 person should be in a hospital because they really
22 need treatment and uhm, you know so, we get
23 complaints and it's really kind of the same
24 complaints.

1
2 So, if you could just talk about you know
3 Commissioner, what you've seen and what areas need to
4 be improved and Associate Commissioner, if you could
5 talk about it a little bit in your visits to Borden.
6 Like, what can we fix? What would you like to see?

7 SONYA RUSSELL: I would like to see more housing
8 for our veterans and all non-veterans.

9 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Right well, we all would
10 like that but let's say facing the conditions at
11 Borden.

12 SONYA RUSSELL: So, I mean we have made some
13 significant changes at Borden since last we spoke.
14 Again, the 233 pods have since been erected and
15 working with ICL who is the provider at that
16 location, we have since painted the entire facility
17 so that it is esthetically pleasing. We have
18 upgraded the wait space, so those veterans who are
19 coming in have a nice wait space. We have upgraded
20 the recreation area, including exercise equipment.
21 So again, those veterans that are inside, they have a
22 space in which they could read a book and/or exercise
23 as a form of activity.

24

25

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2 So, there has been some significant changes since
3 the last time and we invite the City Council out for
4 a visit if time allows you to do so.

5 As it relates to the complaints, while we
6 recognize there are some complaints, we take them on
7 a case by case basis. We have had a security
8 assessment done at the location and we are currently
9 working on enacting some of those recommendations.
10 One of the recommendations was training for the staff
11 on how to deal with individuals that are involved in
12 physical altercations.

13 So, we are working currently with the Department
14 of Homeless Services Police Department to provide
15 that training. The security provider also has an
16 annual training for its staff. So, it is an ongoing
17 issue that we have that we continue to -

18 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: How many counselors does
19 Borden have full-time counselors?

20 SONYA RUSSELL: Social Workers or staff?

21 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Well-

22 SONYA RUSSELL: Well, I can't speak to the number
23 of staff unfortunately, I can get back to you with
24 the exact number but Borden does have a nurse,
25 medical nurse practitioner on site. They have a site

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2 nurse practitioner. They have social workers that
3 are on site that again assist with clients who may be
4 experiencing issues or difficulties while they are
5 there.

6 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: But tell me the procedures
7 there because uhm, I always get a few veterans who
8 want to pull me aside and talk about how they're not
9 getting treatment. They're not getting the mental
10 health. They're not getting the services. So, I can
11 only listen and I could just reach out but it's
12 frustrating. Because I really want to know what the
13 structure is, like do you interview or does the
14 provider interview the clients there on a regular
15 basis? That means there's an open door policy.
16 There's appointments being made. They sit with the
17 individual to try to go over their lives. Like,
18 let's leave here and let's get supportive. Let's go
19 to the next step. You know how often is that -

20 SONYA RUSSELL: So, yes all of our providers, not
21 only at Borden but for all shelter providers are
22 required to meet with residents at least twice a
23 month. Some of them may meet with them a little bit
24 more frequently and it's during that time in which we
25 assess where that person is, what assistance they may

1
2 need, where they are, and how to make appropriate
3 referrals. And I want to stress the importance of
4 choice. Our clients, including our veterans have a
5 choice. So, while there is a clinic on site at
6 Borden, if they so choose to utilize it, it's
7 available to them. Some of them come into the
8 facility already with a medical provider attached to
9 them and what we ask that our providers do is reach
10 out to that medical provider so that they can
11 collaborate and work in conjunction to ensure that
12 that person is getting the services.

13 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: So, they have to reach out
14 to the client twice a month?

15 SONYA RUSSELL: At a minimum sir, yes.

16 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: And if they refuse to meet,
17 then you don't do anything?

18 SONYA RUSSELL: No, we continue you know we don't
19 - they may refuse to meet but we encourage them.
20 There is always some sort of outreach to find out why
21 they are refusing. So, while they may refuse to meet
22 with one level of staff, there may be the Program
23 Director or the Social Worker or the Counselor may
24 reach out and say, "hey, you missed your appointment.
25 How can we help you?"

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2 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Yeah and there's ways to do
3 this. If you know, if you know that somebody is
4 keeping to themselves. They don't want to meet.
5 They don't want to talk to people. You know they're
6 loners. There's a way that we can get doctors or
7 counselors to try to reach out to them.

8 SONYA RUSSELL: Correct.

9 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: And uhm, I mean you know all
10 the methods but Commissioner, let me ask you about
11 DVS. You know do you have a liaison who will go in
12 there and check in on a regular basis and see how are
13 these guys doing?

14 JAMES HENDON: So, we have folks who have desk
15 space over there as far as working out of Borden.
16 So, we do make sure we maintain a strong line of
17 communication there. You know when I think about
18 things in Borden, for me I'm with Sonya and we'd like
19 to see more moveouts. You know for us so we can keep
20 working with our people on that issue.

21 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Yeah, that's my next
22 question because like what's the turnover rate there?
23 How many people do we have leaving on an average
24 basis from Borden per year?

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2 JAMES HENDON: I'll defer to DHS on that because
3 what's key for us is remember with DVS, a lot of our
4 workers, the folks were not eligible VA healthcare.
5 So, it's the folks who we stand that gap. I don't
6 know if our team, you know one housing coordinator,
7 there's about 12 to 15 moveouts per quarter. So,
8 about 12 to 15 per quarter.

9 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: 12 to 15 per quarter?

10 JAMES HENDON: Per housing quarter. So, we're so
11 happy to have two people just onboard a few weeks
12 ago. Prior to that, we have one other person -

13 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: So, about 60 year turnover.
14 60 let's say and then they move on to supportive?

15 LAMARR WHEELER: They could move on to
16 supportive. That's part of the process and the
17 initial process is to determine what they're eligible
18 for and again, the choice, what do they want to do?

19 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Because what I learned at
20 you know I visited shelters around the city. When I
21 visited the veteran shelter, the men seem to offer a
22 lot. That means they could go into and get a job you
23 know at a pretty high level very, very talented
24 individuals. I mean you don't see that in many
25 shelters. What I'm seeing in Borden, that's what

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2 separates them and that's why you know we should try
3 to get you know there's a lot of unions that have
4 training facilities in that area of Long Island City.
5 It's in walking distance in fact, so if we can
6 coordinate with those unions to try to get you know
7 apprenticeships and training. These individuals in
8 Borden especially have a lot to offer because many
9 times one guy was in the Marines ten years, another
10 guy it was 15 years and they're very talented in
11 technology and other areas. So, they've been trained
12 and I just think it's to have men sitting around a
13 lot, it's a shame.

14 So, if we could get really a jobs program, I
15 guess you have some of that.

16 SONYA RUSSELL: Yes, ICL does have an employment
17 workshop that they host for their veterans as well.
18 So, I can definitely speak to their leadership
19 specifically about the uhm apprenticeships.

20 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Yeah, I mentioned it to ICL
21 but I know again, it's limited. So, if we can get
22 actual help from your agency or DVS to try to like
23 just fill in the gaps and coordinate? We'll bring
24 you to some of the unions to talk and to you know I
25 visited the union apprenticeship programs and they're

1
2 magnificent. You know they have beautiful spaces and
3 there's three or four right within walking distance
4 of Borden. It seems like a perfect marriage there,
5 so.

6 SONYA RUSSELL: Absolutely, we're glad to do so.

7 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Alright, and any other
8 questions? Okay, Kristy Marmorato.

9 KRISTY MARMORATO: Hi. So, just again, just
10 touch on what is the general length of time for a
11 stay at a veterans homeless shelter?

12 LAMARR WHEELER: That's a good question. It
13 really depends on how ready the individual is for
14 housing placement and sometimes the hold up is not
15 having all the necessary documentation for that
16 process. For processing for a housing subsidy, there
17 are certain documents that are required.

18 KRISTY MARMORATO: Okay.

19 SONYA RUSSELL: If I may? So, specifically for
20 the veterans in shelter and again, not specific to
21 Borden. But the average length of stay for single
22 veterans is 295 days. For families with children
23 it's 227 days, and for adult families it's 262 days.

24 KRISTY MARMORATO: That's a very long time.
25

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2 SONYA RUSSELL: It is but as Lamarr pointed out,
3 the importance of meeting with these veterans and
4 while our goal is to assist them in moving out as
5 expeditiously as possible, we have to understand that
6 they are in shelter for a reason. There are
7 circumstances that brought them there and we want to
8 ensure that we are meeting their needs where they are
9 and how we can help stabilize them. A number of our
10 veterans again as Chair has pointed out, suffer from
11 mental illness. So, it's important for us to ensure
12 that they're stable. That once they move out into
13 independent living that they stay in their homes,
14 whether it's supportive housing, whether it's by way
15 of City FHEPS, by way of cut backs through CCM. So,
16 it's important why we want to make sure that those
17 individuals, while it may take a little bit longer;
18 well you see the 295. We want to ensure that they
19 are ready to stay out into the independent living.

20 KRISTY MARMORATO: Yeah, I mean I lived it. My
21 uncle, he had a lot of challenges and when he was
22 good, he was amazing, and then when he wasn't, he was
23 not. So, it's very disheartening to see and hear
24 that these and especially when he was in shelters, it
25 was not really a good outcome for him but once you

1
2 get to the more stabilized supportive housing and he
3 was able to get the services that he required, he was
4 amazing.

5 SONYA RUSSELL: Glad to hear that.

6 JAMES HENDON: May I interject something Council
7 Member?

8 KRISTY MARMORATO: Yeah, sure.

9 JAMES HENDON: I think you know you may have
10 someone who says I don't want supportive. I want to
11 go straight to affordable. I don't want to go to
12 something that's a supportive environment. That's an
13 element and then another element, which is beyond us,
14 is the 1.4 percent vacancy rate right now as far as
15 the lack of availability. So, these are other things
16 that may compound it as far as those steps, I have to
17 say that.

18 KRISTY MARMORATO: Yeah and to hear that other
19 Council Member Districts are opposed to veteran
20 homeless shelters and veteran housing. When my
21 community hears that District 13, they are appalled
22 by that and we welcome any kind of veteran supportive
23 housing, shelters. We welcome that.

24 SONYA RUSSELL: Thank you.
25

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2 KRISTY MARMORATO: I would love for you to give
3 me a list of organizations. I have some properties
4 that would be a good fit for my community and for
5 veterans. So, if you can try and get in touch with
6 me, I would appreciate that.

7 SONYA RUSSELL: Absolutely. I appreciate that,
8 thank you so much.

9 KRISTY MARMORATO: And I just have one more
10 question. So, at these shelters, how many of the
11 people working there are actually veterans
12 themselves? Like, is there like a process to give
13 them a job opportunity once they leave the shelter or
14 maybe have them working as they're living there?

15 SONYA RUSSELL: So, uhm again, not only specific
16 to veterans but for all of our residents that need
17 support, the providers work with each and every one
18 of them to secure not only housing but employment.
19 So, if someone enters shelter and they have a skills
20 set that can help them land a job, we work with them.
21 There are employment workshops. We connect with our
22 sister agencies at HRA through Business Link. So, we
23 do work with our veterans and non-veterans to ensure
24 that they are employed if they are able to do so and
25 again, linking them to whatever services that they

1
2 may need that is specific to them as individuals as
3 well as their families if there's a families with
4 children household.

5 KRISTY MARMORATO: Okay.

6 LAMARR WHEELER: And I would just like to address
7 that the staff that are embedded at Borden Avenue,
8 that's part of their tasking. They are there two,
9 three times a week and we made a concerted effort to
10 just hire veterans.

11 KRISTY MARMORATO: That's great, I like to hear
12 that. Thank you. Thank you Chair. Thank you guys.

13 SONYA RUSSELL: Thank you.

14 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Thank you Council Member.
15 Just a few more questions and then we'll go on to the
16 public. Let's talk about persistent homelessness and
17 the service gaps. So, despite the array of programs
18 and supports, New York City still reported an
19 increase in veteran homelessness in 2024. What does
20 DVS think is the reason for this increase?

21 JAMES HENDON: I think it's increased utilization
22 SQUARES Mr. Chair. What's been going on over the
23 past about two and a half years is the cadence with
24 which DHS is using SQUARES, which is basically saying
25 let me take a list of all the folks who are in the

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2 shelter system today. This is what all the folks,
3 all the adults, let's run them through this platform
4 and see where the veterans are. The cadent has -
5 it's slowly been increasing. It used to be just you
6 know running at you know just every couple of months
7 to every couple of weeks and now at a weekly place.
8 And so, as we're getting, as we're increasing this
9 cadence over time, when we know who more of these
10 people are, that's reflected in the numbers. So, I
11 think that's why you see this escalation. I got to
12 once again give the folks at DHS their roses. They
13 are the only city in the country that does this as
14 far as running screening all adult shelter residents
15 for veteran status.

16 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Let's talk about advocacy
17 and funding. What issues, you know when issues
18 arrive, such as conditions at transitional housing
19 sites, what efficacy role does DVS play and how does
20 DVS secure resources or interact with providers to
21 make improvements?

22 JAMES HENDON: So, for us, we always tell our
23 veterans and stakeholder, we are not an advocacy
24 organization. We are by Charter, we are tasked to
25 assist and inform veteran and military families in

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2 certain areas with healthcare, housing, benefits,
3 culture, education, employment. As part of that,
4 what we'll do is we'll say, okay we'll offer to
5 connect that veteran if the veteran is complaining
6 about something.

7 Let's say a veteran is complaining about
8 conditions going on at DHS. We can offer to connect
9 them to our friends at DHS as far as you know Sonya
10 and her team. And let's say that veteran goes there
11 and then they say hey, I'm still running into a brick
12 wall. We then say, okay, here's the information as
13 far as our members of the Council with oversight
14 authority. Here's the information for the inspector
15 general also who has authority there and that's what
16 we do and it's not just a DHS specific situation. In
17 other situations we've come into this where step one
18 is connect that person with the complaint to the
19 agency directly. Step two, if they feel like there's
20 still an issue, say okay, here's the Council
21 Committee that have oversight there and here is the
22 inspector general group that has oversight there.
23 And that's what we usually do in these scenarios.
24 We've even done it for ourselves, so we tell folks,
25 the HRA IG is a person that is covered through us and

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2 make sure they give you - give them your information
3 too if someone has something that's about us, so that
4 folks can be able to exhaust everything available to
5 them.

6 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: So, finally, I mean I do
7 have a question and this one is uhm on the future
8 plans and improvements. So, I mean are there any
9 immediate policy changes or new programs that you
10 believe would most effectively reduce the number of
11 homeless veterans in the city? Or improving their
12 living conditions or to help ensure that the veterans
13 achieve long term housing stability. Like, what you
14 know what have we planned in the future to address
15 that? I know the answer is probably more affordable
16 housing. It's always the answer but let's say on the
17 earlier levels. I think definitely at one point we
18 have to close Borden and get you know and get them
19 right into supportive housing. To me, they've earned
20 that rather than going into a shelter.

21 By the way, just in my observations, what could
22 be improved at Borden is I know I've sidetracked a
23 little bit but just you know you go in there, the
24 lighting is florescent lighting. It's horrendous and
25 it's like an office. It's like a giant office. It

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2 probably was at one point before it was a shelter and
3 that's an inexpensive - that's my next suggestion and
4 if I could help with the funding but it needs really
5 a more residential lighting. That's one that would
6 help a lot. It's just psyche of anybody living
7 there. If you live in florescent lighting for 24/7,
8 it's not good but anyway let's talk about policy.

9 JAMES HENDON: I'll throw some things out there
10 and then I'll defer to Sonya to jump in on this. I
11 think the original sin here is for us on the DVS
12 side, is it's an unfunded mandate working with those
13 who are not eligible VA Healthcare. And that's
14 something where I just wish there was some sort of
15 but that's beyond us, it's a federal issue. Because
16 we've got- each of them seems to be doing 12 to 15
17 moveouts per quarter. You can see how more you know
18 his people could equate to larger numbers here and
19 recognizing a lot of folks we are serving are
20 specifically those who do not have VA healthcare
21 coverage. That's the top one from a policy
22 standpoint Mr. Chair.

23 Another one I put out there is you know I
24 mentioned in the testimony you know more
25 organizations you know that are doing work within the

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2 system you know as far as more groups that are going
3 to Borden and working with those veterans who are
4 housing insecure who are justice involved etc.. Like
5 I feel like that's one. You know you seen us trying
6 to push folks to apply for funding through the Dwyer
7 Program to be able to have resources to be able to
8 help these folks and telling everybody that until
9 5:00 p.m. today to apply for City Council funding
10 nyc.gov/vetcouncilfunding to kind of get some funding
11 through this means. So, more organizations that are
12 actually going into these sites being with our people
13 I think is always a good thing. And the other one,
14 something we're working on is making it just be very
15 open about here are the steps you need to take if you
16 want to as a volunteer come into Borden, come into
17 one of the sites that have our veterans. So, that's
18 something we're actively working on with our friends
19 from DSS as far as the right way to make sure we have
20 this posted online or in visible places where if a
21 veteran organization want's to go to Borden to make
22 donations, be at some service etc., that they can go
23 through the right trap so we can have them come but
24 recognize a lot of the traps exist out of respect for
25 peoples privacy and confidentiality because this is a

1 residence for many folks. And so, I think those are
2 a few things that come to mind for ways that we can
3 be of value Mr. Chair.

4 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Yeah, Associate
5 Commissioner, I just want to just put one more thing
6 out there. We wanted to donate items and you know
7 what I'm going to say.

8 SONYA RUSSELL: I do sir, I do.

9 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: We wanted to donate items
10 but we had a fellow - everybody going in there had to
11 fill out this what do they call it disclaimer?

12 SONYA RUSSELL: MDA's, they're not disclosure
13 agreements. So, yes and first I want to say that I
14 appreciate you and City Council and those that come
15 into Borden to provide donations. We are very
16 appreciative; however, we do have a policy and again
17 as Commissioner Hendon pointed out, it's for the
18 safety and confidentiality of those that are in
19 shelter. So, to the extent that you know we can, we
20 want to be able to ensure -

21 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: I know but see to veterans
22 because these were veterans who were collecting for
23 veterans and they felt wow, like I have to fill out
24 all these forms and you know - I don't you know I
25

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2 don't disagree with them that they were trying to do
3 something, give and then they put up the bureaucratic
4 stuff and put in front of them and I'd just like to
5 know what happened? Like the year before, we didn't
6 have to do that and now we have to. Is the lawyers
7 getting involved I guess or?

8 SONYA RUSSELL: So, this was a policy that came
9 about September, I want to say September 2024. So,
10 this was around the time in which you yourself as
11 well as FDNY came into Borden. So, we don't want to
12 make it a pugilistic or you know come across as if
13 though we are preventing those or adding additional
14 layers of bureaucracy but we have first most you know
15 privacy for our clients. Hence why we ask that these
16 NDA's be signed in advance and I even offered to meet
17 with those entities that wanted to come in to explain
18 it to them so that they did not feel as if we did not
19 appreciate what they were doing because we do. ICL
20 as well as DHS, DSS are very appreciative of those -

21 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Yeah, so you see how the
22 miscommunication is because when you go there and you
23 got to fill out this - here's some paperwork to fill
24 out before we take your items. You know it's almost
25

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2 like a kick in the head, so you know especially for
3 veterans.

4 SONYA RUSSELL: I understand.

5 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: You know because veterans
6 are trying to help veterans and that's where I think
7 sometimes bend a little you know. Do you want to
8 mention something?

9 COUNCIL MEMBER PALADINO: No, I agree with you
10 100 percent.

11 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Alright because I heard you
12 in the background.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER PALADINO: No, I was saying that I
14 agree with Bob 100 percent. It gives people, even
15 when we go as Council Members to go visit homeless
16 shelters, you know I go just because. I just want to
17 say hello and see how everybody is doing and make
18 sure everything is okay and everybody is happy. It's
19 just passing by sort of thing and when I'm stopped at
20 the door, not with a veteran, I'm talking at homeless
21 services and I'm told I can't come in. Well, human
22 instinct then tells you what are you hiding? If I
23 can't just come in and shake hands and say hi, you
24 want a cup of coffee? You want to sit down for a
25 while and talk? Because that's how it used to be

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2 with my homeless shelters. I used to just be able to
3 pop in and say hi, and sit down with the ladies and
4 just talk and then go and it was all okay. So, when
5 I'm stopped at the door and somebody tells me you
6 can't; now in this instance that Bob is referring to,
7 we took as Council Members, we took donations in our
8 districts. One particular lady in my district
9 knitted. I don't know how many hats, caps to wear and
10 uhm, we had to wait for special permission to get
11 there.

12 So, it bothered people that I had explain to them
13 that we have to wait you know because they were
14 anxious to hear. So, I had to say no, we got to
15 wait. I of course butted it up and put a little
16 forcing on it, not to make it sound like because like
17 I said, human instinct is to say, "well, why aren't
18 they letting you in?" And I just don't understand
19 that.

20 SONYA RUSSELL: I totally understand that. So
21 again, it's not about us hiding anything. Those that
22 do not have the same intentions of wanting to help,
23 we need to protect our client and that being their
24 temporary home. So, while again we are appreciative
25 of the Veterans Association, City Council and those

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2 who want to do right by our clients. Those who mean
3 well by our clients. We have to leverage that
4 against those who might not want to. Those who try
5 to come into the facility and cause harm or
6 disruption. So, in order for us to again protect the
7 privacy in a safe environment for those that are
8 seeking shelter with DHS, we have to vet individuals
9 before they come into our building. So, I do want to
10 say to the City Council, we welcome you to come into
11 our building but understand that we do require you
12 know prior notice before you come so that we can -
13 exactly correct. Thank you.

14 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Sure, no we get that but
15 again, sometimes somebody has to make a decision.
16 So, you know these are veterans coming in. They're
17 with two Council, three Council Members, we're going
18 to just let them come in because then veterans - we
19 had a whole bunch of veterans that did a lot of work
20 in their own time, they had to leave because they
21 wouldn't sign. Not one veteran would sign that.

22 SONYA RUSSELL: And that's unfortunate.

23 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: No, but that should tell you
24 something. Somebody has got to think on their feet a
25 little bit and say you know what, let's dispense with

1 that for now because the Council Members are there.
2 It's a you know they've done a great thing and we're
3 not going to fill out paper or we'll do it in
4 advance, way in advance and we'll do it in a nice
5 way. Yeah, so sometimes you know there's a little
6 bit of a human element here that needs to be
7 addressed but aside from that, I just want to ask you
8 in this last question - I think this is the last
9 question but Associate Commissioner, what would you
10 do with Borden to improve it? Other than what I said
11 about the lighting, what do you think we could
12 improve upon and the Commissioner said we could
13 probably you know hopefully get the VA to work on you
14 know health, to try to get more veterans health
15 benefits but else could we do to Borden, with Borden
16 to make it a little bit more of a better experience
17 for veterans? In your visits, you're just sort of
18 thinking outside the box here. If we had you know
19 more funding let's say.

21 SONYA RUSSELL: So, of course, I would never turn
22 down more funding and again, I think the
23 beautification process that we went through was based
24 on my visits at Borden, which is what led them to the
25 painting.

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2 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: It was an improvement, so
3 what you suggested was it's better.

4 SONYA RUSSELL: Yes, it is.

5 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: And again, if you would
6 agree with me on the food, I would look at you know
7 certainly I'd have a partner. I know the
8 Commissioner agrees with that but you know if we can
9 get better food, because I remember one person and
10 the person is not there anymore at Borden. This was
11 a few years ago when I first became Chair. I was
12 told that we don't want to make it too comfortable
13 for the veterans because they're stay, and I'll never
14 forget that. So, somebody said that to me who was in
15 leadership but that person is not there anymore but
16 it was said to me and that's why I don't forget it
17 because I say well, that's really, that's terrible
18 and that person shouldn't be with veterans then
19 because I don't care if they were there ten years,
20 they deserve that.

21 They deserve better than that but they certainly
22 don't deserve a comment like that. So that's the
23 mentality that sometimes people have, especially you
24 know I don't know again, I don't want to point
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2 fingers with who that was but it was somebody in
3 leadership. So that comment is disturbing.

4 SONYA RUSSELL: That is not our view.

5 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: That's not your view; no I
6 understand that because there are dedicated people
7 but there are some people that are not. They're
8 doing it as a job and sometimes they get frustrated
9 but they'll make comments, we don't want to make it
10 too comfortable.

11 So, if we can come up with something, you know
12 any other improvements, we'll meet and we'll talk
13 about it.

14 SONYA RUSSELL: I would welcome that.

15 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Obviously the lighting. If
16 we can get funding from the Council to try to improve
17 that, funding from the VA, whatever we can do we'd
18 like to work on that with you and certainly the
19 mental health and you know RTM I think you know it's
20 in the bills today. By the way Commissioner, what do
21 you think about our bills?

22 JAMES HENDON: I thought you'd never ask. I mean

23 -

24 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Yeah, we want to talk about
25 the bills, yeah.

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2 JAMES HENDON: Just kidding, just kidding. For
3 Legislation from Council Member Vernikov, this is the
4 one that HPD, where it's basically asking HPD to
5 submit reports. Sorry, for the legislation, you know
6 from 465, you know asking HPD to submit annual
7 reports regarding those who are using the veterans
8 preference from Mitchell Lama. We're optimistic, we
9 use SQUARES to help them identify the veterans who
10 are in that system. The only issue with this one is
11 there's a part here where it says that they need to -
12 HPD's report on the number of applicants denied due
13 to failure to provide satisfactory proof of veteran
14 status. HPD doesn't deal with that, HPD only - the
15 providers, the actual Mitchell Lama developments
16 themselves you know screen for eligibility for
17 Mitchell Lama for the veterans preference. I'll get
18 screening for; did you serve during a time of war?
19 You know so during a war period. Do you have an
20 honorable discharge? And do you live in New York?
21 And so, right now that's one thing the HPD
22 doesn't have a handle on data wise and it's simply
23 because it's something that - it's more of a binary
24 checkoff. It's done by the housing developer

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2 themselves but for these other things, it's something
3 that we believe can't be.

4 What we're talking about is we don't know if this
5 happens if someone is already told these are the
6 standards to apply for this preference and it's not
7 us but another entity, the developer that's obtaining
8 these and somebody says, okay, well, I have a
9 dishonorable discharge, I'm not going to apply or I
10 didn't serve during a time of war, I'm not going to
11 apply. I don't live in New York State; I'm not going
12 to apply but that's the only issue with that one as
13 far as 465.

14 As far as 1171, with 1171, it's the and this is
15 the one about a feasibility study with doing a
16 Reconsolidation of Traumatic Memories, you know the
17 RTM protocol. With 1171, it's about the price point.
18 You've got you know from doing an analysis of fiscal
19 impact, is anywhere from 50,000. If it's just a
20 feasibility study on the city rolling out RTM, you're
21 looking at 50,000. It goes up to as high as 250,000
22 if you're saying we need to have some sort of
23 validation of the therapy itself, which is more of an
24 academic exercise and something that the Department
25 of Health typically does not do. The Department of

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2 Health does not do those types of studies that
3 validate the healthcare modalities but it's 50 to 250
4 based on where things stand with that so you can see,
5 yeah.

6 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: It's a program that you
7 could do a smaller study just to come up with
8 numbers. [INAUDIBLE 01:18:59]

9 JAMES HENDON: And so, it's you're right, it's
10 really the sliding scale where if it's just something
11 we're just talking about, looking at the operational
12 aspects of it. That's the lower end at the end of
13 the day. If you're looking at, can we validate, can
14 the city validate a particular healthcare modality,
15 that's on the higher end and then we run into issues
16 with our friends at Department of Health who say, it
17 is our policy to not as a city validate specific
18 healthcare modalities. So, but yeah.

19 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: So, are you in favor of the
20 bill?

21 JAMES HENDON: If we can pay for it, so -

22 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Not you pay for it but we -
23 the City Council would have to you know along with
24 the Mayor negotiate that. It's a pilot program and
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2 we could put parameters in there and so there's still
3 room for negotiations.

4 JAMES HENDON: So, if the funding is not issued
5 and if it's a focus on the operational aspects of
6 rolling this out, then I think that's something we
7 could actually do.

8 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: So if we had the funding.

9 JAMES HENDON: As long as we have the funding -

10 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: No, the funding has to be
11 attached to this. That goes without saying but you
12 would support it?

13 JAMES HENDON: Hmm, hmm right that is correct,
14 yeah that's correct.

15 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: And the other one, the uh -

16 JAMES HENDON: So for procurement and veteran
17 owned businesses and different things there, first of
18 all, we currently have the Veteran Business
19 Leadership Association, which accounts for a lot of
20 things that are addressed in this legislation. And
21 so, what we'll really be saying instead of SBS being
22 in the driver's seat, that DVS will be in the
23 driver's seat on how this community is organized and
24 right now we do a lot of these things already with
25 the Veteran Business Leadership Association. Beyond

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2 that, when it comes to the question of veteran status
3 for those who are registered to do this with the
4 city, MOCS when someone is applying to be a part of
5 the Pay Information Portal, that is already something
6 that's already a question there, which it's a
7 voluntary question so whether folks are answering yes
8 or no to be right back to other things we discussed
9 where that already occurs.

10 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: So you're saying this
11 already exists, we don't need the bill?

12 JAMES HENDON: I'm saying that it already - it's
13 not codified.

14 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: So, this is codifying it.

15 JAMES HENDON: If it were to be codified, we
16 already do this so it should be that it's DVS because
17 right now it's written in such a way where it's SBS
18 should run this. If it is to be codified, then it
19 should be codified with DVS that owns this piece.
20 And just acknowledging we already do the identifier
21 questions for folks who are - the entities that are
22 doing business with the City of New York that already
23 asked that by MOCS.

24 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Alright, what about the
25 Community Board, the 684?

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2 JAMES HENDON: Community Board, it's the same
3 thing I always say, I love the spirit of the
4 Community Board. The worry, speaking beyond me is
5 we're setting a precedent where the Council is now
6 you know dictating the governance of all community
7 boards, and so it's about crossing the rubican. So,
8 for me, as far as the principle of it, very much in
9 support of it. You know we already do work to liaise
10 with different Community Boards.

11 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: That again, with this bill,
12 I'm trying to help with veterans who don't self-
13 identify and that, the more we could drive that home
14 or else how do we address that? I mean, I'm looking
15 for answers if you can come up with better answers.
16 So, on a Community Board level, 59 community boards,
17 if we had a Veterans Committee to address some of it.
18 I'm not saying how many times they have to be, all
19 I'm saying is get the word out, have a hearing you
20 know from time to time. It could be whatever,
21 quarterly you know it's up to each Community Board.
22 We're not saying mandatory monthly meetings no.
23 We're saying let's create a Veterans Committee and
24 let's try to deal with some of the issues and the
25 biggest one is only 24 percent of New York City

1
2 Veterans self-identify. So, how do we address that?
3 If you have some other ideas.

4 JAMES HENDON: You know me, I mean my ideas are
5 everyone should ask the question as far as Local Law
6 37 questions I think that everyone should use VA
7 SQUARES if you are a government entity or social
8 service provider that's nonprofit, you should use
9 SQUARES as far as ways to identify. What's tough
10 about this is I'm with you on it, I just worry that
11 if you know I know you've spent many years in a
12 Community Board and so, to have a law coming down
13 saying three decades. A law comes down saying
14 Community Board, you must do X, I think it's the
15 worry of what next? It's the precedent. In another
16 words this will be the first one but then this could
17 become -

18 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Yeah, see I don't care about
19 that. I know you know City Government might have to
20 care but I think it's different dealing with veterans
21 that you know we owe veterans and this is one little
22 step on a community board just to you know recognize
23 how we help veterans and how we help and again, this
24 could come up where you know the Community Board is
25 dealing with - oh, I know this veteran that's on 34th

1 Street in Manhattan and he's on the street. And
2 again, on a local level it starts to deal with
3 homelessness, it starts to deal with self-
4 identification. It's starts to deal with mental
5 health issues. So, I think anyway we can have more
6 conversations on this on a local level.
7

8 JAMES HENDON: And I'm supportive of this. I
9 want to be clear, I am. I'm just flagging this
10 larger issue that's beyond need on it as far as the -

11 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: It's funny, I'm hearing
12 because I hear the same pushback from not only the
13 Council. I'm hearing it from the Administration and
14 I'm wondering why. So, that's why I don't
15 understand. I thought this would fly through and
16 that's why I don't - well, we're dictating what
17 Community Boards are saying and I don't buy that.
18 You know I'm just like saying, if we have a problem
19 and the Mayor knows there's a problem and the City
20 Council knows that there's a problem with self-
21 identification, tell me how we can deal with it and
22 I'm trying on a local level now with this bill. It's
23 not just to have a veterans committee, it's to bring
24 the issues forward. But you know and if leadership
25 doesn't want this to go through, this bill will never

1 see the light of day. That's how this Council works.
2 If they don't want it to happen, it won't happen.
3 So, I have to convince people that it should happen
4 and I think that's my role as Chair of this
5 Committee. Thank you Commissioner and thank you to
6 the Associate Commissioner. Yes.

8 SONYA RUSSELL: You're welcome but before we
9 convene, I do want to say that yes, there is a
10 veterans indicator in the CAP system.

11 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: There is?

12 SONYA RUSSELL: There is.

13 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: There's a box?

14 SONYA RUSSELL: Yes.

15 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Oh, that's good, thank you
16 so much. Thank you for that.

17 SONYA RUSSELL: You're very welcome.

18 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Okay and so, thank you
19 panel. This is great, we got some good testimony.
20 Alright, in person first. We're doing in person
21 panels first. Sorry, I have to read this. This is
22 uh - I now open the hearing for public testimony. I
23 remind members of the public that this is a formal
24 government proceeding and that decorum shall be
25 observed at all times.

1
2 As such, members of the public shall remain
3 silent at all times. The witness table is reserved
4 for people who wish to testify. No video recording
5 or photography is allowed from the witness table.
6 Further, members of the public may not present audio
7 or video recordings as testimony. They may submit
8 transcripts of such recordings to the Sergeant at
9 Arms in the back for inclusion at the hearing.

10 If you wish to speak at today's hearing, please
11 fill out an appearance card with the Sergeant at Arms
12 again in the back. When recognized, you will have
13 three minutes to speak on today's topic addressing
14 the needs of homeless veterans. That's the topic for
15 today. Addressing the needs of homeless veterans.
16 So, you have to speak on topic. This is what the
17 Council is saying. We will hear all in person
18 testimony first and then turn to testimony on Zoom.

19 If you have a written statement or additional
20 written testimony you wish to submit for the record,
21 please provide a copy of that testimony to the
22 Sergeant at Arms. I will now call the first panel
23 Francesca DiPaola,

24 FRANCESCA DIPAOLA: That's me.
25

1
2 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: That's you. Armando
3 Crescenzi and Christopher Leon Johnson. You never go
4 first?

5 FRANCESCA DIPAOLA: I never did before.

6 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Oh okay. Francesca, you
7 could start.

8 FRANCESCA DIPAOLA: Okay perfect. So, I actually
9 just came from Borden and I am the CEO of Homes for
10 Veterans. We're a privately funded 501C3 nonprofit
11 and we do barrier free and accessible modifications
12 in the homes of disabled veterans but we do provide
13 other services like helping veterans get their
14 benefits. We do a lot of essential item drops at
15 Borden and I wanted to grow our relationship with New
16 York and helping Borden out.

17 So, I actually have a list of things that they
18 needed because you were asking how we can improve.

19 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Great.

20 FRANCESCA DIPAOLA: And if you wanted to - yeah,
21 I just - everything you were asking, I actually have
22 answers for.

23 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: So, you went around Borden
24 and did some work?

1
2 FRANCESCA DIPAOLA: Yes, I signed the NDA. I did
3 a tour with my intern. I have a list of things.
4 It's not long. So, I know you were focused on the
5 lighting. I don't know if maybe somebody else said
6 that to you but the main thing -

7 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: No, I -

8 FRANCESCA DIPAOLA: Oh, that was a you thing.

9 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: That was the first thing I
10 note.

11 FRANCESCA DIPAOLA: Okay, so the main thing that
12 they've been trying to fixed for 15 years is the
13 roof. It's leaking and you know I was actually going
14 to offer to pay for that but there was push back
15 because they don't - and I've been working with ICL
16 specifically so I know it's like; I'm just sort of
17 learning what's going on. You know I just want to
18 help. I don't want to step on anyone's toes. So, I
19 offered to help that but if you're offering funding,
20 let's get the roof fixed.

21 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Yeah, no, I think we both
22 can - you know because I don't know if I'll get the
23 funding. We could ask but if the roof is leaking,
24 that's a structural problem. That should be fixed.

1
2 FRANCESCA DIPAOLA: It's bad and it's been going
3 on for 15 years apparently.

4 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Okay.

5 FRANCESCA DIPAOLA: And I'm willing to you know
6 help with that. We're a really small nonprofit but
7 we're lean and we're good, so you know whatever we
8 could do to help let me know but I wanted to put that
9 on your radar immediately.

10 The second thing that I also offered to help with
11 that I think we could do really quickly is they said
12 because it's like a sliding door, that's an automatic
13 sliding door that opens when you go in, the veterans
14 said they're very cold so they wanted to install one
15 of these like wind vents that pushes the cold air
16 out. I told them to send us an estimate on that.
17 It's probably not - oh man, can we schedule a
18 meeting?

19 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: No, no, you could go on.
20 I'm going to let you get extra time.

21 FRANCESCA DIPAOLA: Okay so the wind vent-

22 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Was that three minutes? No,
23 not two, we're doing three.

24 FRANCESCA DIPAOLA: Okay, uhm thank you. The
25 wind vent, I told them to send me an estimate on

1
2 that, so they could send me the estimate. I could
3 share that with you as well. Another thing are the
4 starter kits when the veterans leave the facility and
5 they go on to their housing, they have these
6 beautiful starter kits that are like pots and pans
7 and stuff like that but they said, they were
8 struggling to get every single veteran one of those
9 kits so like let's make up a number. Let's say it
10 was 60 veterans that move out, they get like I don't
11 know 50. Like, they're just short some months
12 because they don't have enough funding, so I offered
13 every quarter to either get a corporate sponsor or
14 for us to donate it. So that's like again, like a
15 really easy thing.

16 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: So, like a kit to move into
17 an apartment they'd get?

18 FRANCESCA DIPAOLA: Pots, pans, basic.

19 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Dishes or?

20 FRANCESCA DIPAOLA: Forks, spoons, yeah, things
21 like that.

22 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Okay, yeah, that should be
23 you know again, we could work together on that.

24 FRANCESCA DIPAOLA: Super easy, yeah so that was
25 another thing and then another thing that I really

1 wanted to help with, they did a big cookout last year
2 because I know you said you guys were trying to
3 donate and you were kind of not able to get inside.
4 So, this summer they're going to do - they did a
5 really successful cookout last year. They said it
6 was great. They are doing one for Memorial Day,
7 tentatively the Thursday before Memorial Day. They
8 want to do multiple of those in the summer, so I also
9 offered to try to get some corporate sponsors to try
10 to raise money to help you know chips, soda, just
11 make those cookouts kind of like a really nice thing
12 for the veterans to look forward to in the summer.
13 And I just think more of the community that we can
14 get involved the better because DVS was mentioning
15 how do we get the word out about this is the only
16 veteran homeless shelter in New York City. I'm from
17 Bergen county, I never heard of this and people, we
18 don't have a shelter like this in New Jersey at all.
19 We don't have the same kind of homelessness issue so
20 even in New Jersey, like I think we should get the
21 word out about this shelter. People want to help
22 veterans like you said. I think more people should
23 know about it. So, the cookouts could be a way, like
24
25

1
2 an easier way for people to get involved. It's like
3 less intimidating than fixing the roof let's say.

4 So, that was my list. Again, we can like -

5 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: What about the kitchen, you
6 saw the kitchen?

7 FRANCESCA DIPAOLA: They didn't take me back in
8 there but we passed by. Yeah, I did ask about it. I
9 didn't want to like- I didn't want to be too
10 aggressive but I uhm, you know I - oh and another
11 thing, the offices where all of these reps are, so
12 you guys have reps in these offices, they were really
13 like, I thought the facility was much more beautiful
14 for the veterans than where the reps are forced to go
15 in my opinion. There's no windows. Like if I was a
16 caseworker there, I would not want to go to work and
17 my intern who has worked in New York Presbyterian
18 Hospital for 20 years and she goes to Leeman now.
19 She was like, I would go there and be on my phone all
20 day. Like it was depressing for the workers you
21 know.

22 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Yeah, no, I totally agree
23 with that. So, very good suggestions. Maybe we can
24 coordinate and we can go together.

25 FRANCESCA DIPAOLA: Please.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: And then we could walk. I
3 want to show you the kitchen but I'd like some input,
4 so -

5 FRANCESCA DIPAOLA: Please yeah and we can do
6 that. Can I give you my card?

7 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Yes. You could stay. You
8 could stay. We might have some questions for you.

9 FRANCESCA DIPAOLA: Okay, thank you.

10 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Armando. Just state your
11 name for the record.

12 ARMANDO CRESCENZI: Armando Crescenzi, Put
13 Veterans First. I'm happy to speak on veterans
14 homelessness. You all know that for the last 20
15 years, I've been a veterans advocate in all things
16 relating to street vending. And that includes
17 merchandise and that includes food, so as it says in
18 these preamble of the DOE fund, work, works. So,
19 really vending is a great opportunity for veterans
20 who are going through crisis maybe returning to the
21 city. Maybe they're just great entrepreneurs. It's
22 a huge opportunity and certainly a pathway to self
23 sufficiency for veterans who might be going through
24 crisis.

1
2 So, having said that, I just would like to go on
3 with something I prepared. Imagine living in a
4 country where your business can be shut down by your
5 competition. With the physical group force of the
6 local Police Department.

7 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Yeah, I just want to say,
8 the topic of this hearing is homelessness of
9 veterans. So, you got to address that okay because
10 we heard you know we understand again, we're going to
11 address that but what we need is for your to address
12 the topic of the hearing.

13 ARMANDO CRESCENZI: Sure so let me stay focused.
14 That's not really what was going to be my approach
15 but I will comply with your request. So, basically
16 there are thousands of veterans in the city who are
17 housing insecure. I don't know if you're aware of
18 that. I mean, everybody talks about the outreach,
19 the outreach so it's like you know where do vets sign
20 up? Where do they self-identify, right? Well, I
21 know one place where they self-identify, at the
22 Department of Consumer and Worker Protection. Where
23 if you tell a veteran that he can work as a vendor,
24 street vending or food vending, then they come
25 forward and self-identify. Every year there's a

1 turnover but there's roughly between 1,000 and 1,500
2 service disabled vets who are stepping forward to
3 self-identify. So, if that is one of the weak links,
4 I would like to submit that's one place to start, the
5 Department of Consumer Worker Protection. Also,
6 there are - when veterans come back and face the
7 city, you know it's a hard city to make a living in
8 and the transition is likewise hard and housing is
9 just too damn high. So, self-sufficiency is a
10 crucial mechanism to fight veteran homelessness.
11 Alright, I do it. I mean from time to time I find
12 myself in financial difficulty and I'm really
13 grateful that I have the flexibility to street vend.
14 Now, for some veterans, it might be that they want to
15 start a business. For other veterans, they're in
16 crisis. Either way, that opportunity should be
17 available for New York City veterans. Actually, it's
18 mandated by New York State that veterans have certain
19 privileges and I'm speaking specifically to placement
20 restrictions because this is one of the issues that
21 drives veterans from seeking that self-sufficiency as
22 vendors. The city and the City Council and a myriad
23 of agencies if they recognized the rights of these
24 veterans to try to become self-sufficient. Alright,
25

1
2 if these rights are recognized then more veterans
3 would step forward and try to do that.

4 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: By the way, we're meeting
5 with the Police Commissioner. Hopefully we get a
6 date very quickly. That's on the agenda of our five
7 top projects or issues with the Police Commissioner
8 to stop having NYPD harass the veterans or at least
9 you know let them have a location and let you know -

10 ARMANDO CRESCENZI: Well, they're actually, I'm
11 sorry -

12 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: I just want to get - but we
13 got to move on. We just have to move on alright.

14 ARMANDO CRESCENZI: The offices who are issuing
15 those tickets are actually in contempt of a court
16 order.

17 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: That's on the topic and I'll
18 bring back what the Commissioner says about that, so
19 I know she's a problem solver and I'm sure she'll
20 address it. Thank you.

21 CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Hello, my name is
22 Christopher Leon Johnson. I'm here to support your
23 bill Bob, Intro. 685. I want to know why Sandy
24 Nurse, who's on the Committee, I think she should be
25 removed because the way she was here today was

1
2 disgusting. She came in looking all condescending
3 and didn't even ask this man a question. She didn't
4 even stay like at least 15 before the hearing. So,
5 and she didn't even jump on the bill. Is it because
6 that it doesn't say homeless sex offenders are a part
7 of the bill? Is that the reason why? Because we all
8 know that Sandy Nurse loves to stand with known
9 pedophiles like Akeem Browder and Douglas Powell. Is
10 that the reason she's not jumping on the bill? I
11 want to know why, what's going on here?

12 Now, let's make this clear that he's right about
13 how they harass the veterans. They love harassing
14 veterans with the tickets. They love to harass the
15 veterans because they're easy. They're easy, they
16 know these guys don't fight back but they wouldn't
17 dare to harass those illegal vendors that are legally
18 not supposed to be here under Trump at Corona Plaza
19 and all over Roosevelt Avenue.

20 Now, the big issue is, the big issue is that the
21 City Council, starting with you Mr. Holden need to
22 start going through Roosevelt Avenue, not sending
23 Phil, not sending Alyssia, not sending Daniel. You
24 yourself need to go to Roosevelt and call this stuff
25 out on the heart of Corona Plaza and walk the

1
2 Roosevelt and see what's going on. They don't get
3 harassed because of Council Members like Sandy Nurse
4 who is a piece of I'm not going to say the word,
5 piece of crap Council Member, she is one of the main
6 engineers in the City Council with the help of the
7 May Day Space and Star Bar that are protecting these
8 guys and gals. You don't come out there Bob. Not
9 one time during the rally's at Roosevelt, been out
10 there with the people trying to say we need to get
11 rid of these guys and gals. These guys are getting
12 harassed first, they always get harassed first. They
13 always get hassled by the NYPD. When you go to Time
14 Square, they get the biggest stick up the butt
15 because they always get tickets all the time while
16 the Jennifer Ross Cumar crowd who are mostly Indians,
17 Hindus and Arabs, they never get harassed. They
18 stand out 24 hours. They stink, they smell, you can
19 see the fires come out their cart. They never get
20 harassed. They never get tickets but veterans always
21 get tickets, so he's right about this. The NYPD does
22 nothing about it but give these guys a ticket. Oh,
23 we're tough on crime. We're tough on crime with the
24 vendors. Let's give this guy a ticket instead of
25 giving the [INAUDIBLE 01:40:49] the legal the ticket,

1
2 the migrant the ticket. And Bob, you do nothing
3 about it.

4 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Well again, the topic of
5 this hearing is on homelessness.

6 CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: That's the topic of
7 the hearing man. It's about homeless veterans
8 because some of those veterans are homeless and they
9 get hassled alive. But Bob, you need to go to
10 Roosevelt. You need to go to Time Square and start
11 talking to these veterans in person and see what's
12 going on here because he's right and it's wrong for
13 you to cut this guy off and say that's not on topic.

14 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: He had four minutes, so I
15 gave him more time. Alright, thanks, thanks.

16 CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Thank you. Thank you.
17 Thank you man. We support our veterans here, unlike
18 Sandy Nurse.

19 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Next panel is Jo Bello,
20 Timothy Pena, and Raul Rivera. Jo, you're on lead
21 off. You want to wait? Okay, let's go Raul. You're
22 on the end, alright you're passing it off to Tim,
23 okay.

24 TIMOTHY PENA: Hello, thank you for allowing me
25 to speak today. My name is Timothy Pena, I run an

1
2 organization. I own a company called Veterans
3 Justice Project, which advocates for homeless and
4 incarcerated veterans. I also run an organization
5 called, the Forgotten Veteran.

6 On topic of the supportive housing and
7 transitional services, I spent five months in Borden
8 Avenue myself waiting for my paperwork. My apartment
9 was empty at the time. There are still two empty
10 apartments in my building for veterans that have been
11 empty for an excess of now two and a half years since
12 I came to New York.

13 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Where is this?

14 TIMOTHY PENA: This is through a HASA program in
15 supportive housing over in Chelsea. So, I know what
16 coming into supportive housing program is like
17 because I went through the paperwork. I have a HASA
18 voucher with a HUDVSH voucher. So, I have a HASA
19 program HUDVSH voucher. I've been there for two
20 years. It took about one year to even get the
21 paperwork done for so we could have - sign a lease.
22 So, by the time I got moved in, there was no
23 paperwork ever done. I got threatened by Borden
24 staff security and so, I was taken out of there for
25 my own personal safety and they wanted to send me

1
2 over to Colonial House but I insisted on going to my
3 apartment which was empty and waiting. And so,
4 that's I had my keys. I got threatened by about 8:00
5 a.m. After testifying in front of the New York State
6 Assembly, this was in 2022. By 3:30 I had my keys to
7 my apartment, so they can get it done.

8 I'm insulted by the 295 days average because
9 that's absolutely not true. It's much longer. The
10 VA's grant peridium program, which is sharing space
11 with veterans who have not earned their benefits that
12 the rest of us have and who are doing criminal
13 damage, making assaults, engaging in drug and gang
14 activity are ruining it for the rest of us who have
15 served our country honorably and have earned these
16 benefits.

17 The two - this idea that we are keeping veterans
18 in Borden Avenue for them to reach mental health
19 stability is a crock. Council Member Marmorato, you
20 said yourself your father was much better after he
21 left the shelter, so why is DHS leaving us in the
22 shelters? The reason why is because the VA is paying
23 them to leave us in the shelters for up to two years,
24 which is the extent of the GPD program. Those 154
25 beds that they're collecting almost \$4 million a

1
2 year, only have about 116. The rest of those VA paid
3 for; VA funded beds are filled with non-VA veterans.
4 Donations that are coming in, we saw this with
5 Francesca, we're not allowed in there. We're not
6 embraced as veterans. We come in, we couldn't even
7 serve coffee because they wouldn't allow us in the
8 door, so we had to serve coffee in what 26, 27
9 degrees and out on the park bench, the only bench
10 outside of that facility.

11 If you notice the article I gave you, this guy is
12 inside Borden Avenue filming veterans, promising the
13 claims, then posting them on his nonprofit website
14 and then asking for donations. This is the type of
15 people that DHS will allow inside Borden Avenue to
16 film and violate their HIPAA, their VA rights and
17 policies.

18 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Alright thanks Tim. We got
19 to - okay.

20 TIMOTHY PENA: So I appreciate -

21 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: I'll look at that, okay
22 we'll look at that article and thank you. Thank you
23 for your testimony. Jo Bello, you ready?

24 JOSEPH BELLO: Yeah.

25 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Okay.

1
2 JOSEPH BELLO: Is this on? Yeah, here we go.
3 Uhm, I really don't have testimony, I just kind of
4 wanted to point a few things out like listening to
5 what was going on. So, first and foremost, I just
6 really wanted to point out as a reminder to everybody
7 that in June of 2023, the Mayor held with DVS a
8 housing summit at City Hall and if we're talking
9 about housing, in need of housing for veterans,
10 really we still don't know what came out of that
11 meeting. A number of people I've spoken to went
12 there, pictures were taken, things were said. They
13 talked about something in Brooklyn and I don't know
14 what came out of that meeting. So, maybe if there's
15 a follow-up conversation, you might want to do that.

16 The other thing to is to Francesca. In speaking
17 to Borden Avenue, I think they did say to you that
18 the relinking group has to go to DHS and that there
19 has to be - they have to do when they do the capital
20 project, so that's something that maybe you want to
21 talk to her about as well with capital project.

22 In terms of the Commissioners testimony, one of
23 the things that I'm still really, I'm always
24 struggling with is where they're getting their data
25 from and the data numbers that are thrown out,

1
2 there's no context to those numbers. So, for
3 example, you know when I worked in the City Council
4 and one of your predecessors, when the Commissioner
5 had announced that they had housed a 1,000 veterans,
6 we asked them that's great. How many were
7 recidivism? How many were single females? We asked
8 them a number of questions that we never got answers
9 to.

10 So in anything when numbers are thrown out, I'm
11 always looking to what's the context and hence, I'm
12 not getting the context of what, how he knows these
13 numbers, where these numbers are coming from and you
14 know what's behind them. So, the data is always to
15 me either a point and time or we really don't know.

16 One of the other things that I didn't hear about
17 this hearing that I was very concerned about is
18 aging. So, we know at Borden Avenue, some of the
19 residents are as old as 80 and recently one of the
20 residents is 78. I don't think they need workforce
21 development at that point. I think they need
22 something other than supportive housing as well. So,
23 we need to have a conversation around Borden Avenue
24 around aging and around what we're doing because we
25 are and I think we all know this looking at everybody

1
2 in here, we are an aging population. 70 percent of
3 us or 72 percent of us in New York City are over the
4 age of 55. So, we have to have that conversation as
5 well.

6 In terms of the NDA's, that is the problem and
7 one of the things that I would have liked to have
8 asked DHS is a number of us including the groups that
9 you went with would like to see the policy. I don't
10 think they've been very clear about the policy on
11 these NDA's and certainly, they don't - NDA's don't
12 screen people. NDA's are basically like no
13 photographs and we have to wonder where that rule
14 came out of. So, I think one of the things that ICL
15 has been talking about is like everyone looking at
16 them and them saying but it's not us, it's DHS for
17 this policy that came out in September of 2024. So,
18 that has to be addressed. Yeah, and the other thing
19 too. The last two points is DHS doesn't make this
20 clear in their testimony here today, that this a
21 policy in every shelter. I would have liked to have
22 at least heard that point. I'm guessing it is but I
23 certainly didn't hear that. I only heard Borden
24 Avenue so.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Well, yeah we could ask
3 that. That's a good question is this only for Borden
4 and we'll find that out quickly.

5 JOSEPH BELLO: Yeah and uhm, uh yeah, that's it.
6 Just the other thing is I was just curious that you
7 were mentioning workforce development but the DHS rep
8 was saying a lot of the vets have mental health. We
9 know the average age of the veterans at Borden Avenue
10 are like in their 50's, late 40's, 50's. Most of
11 them are Gulf War I vets. So, is it mental health?
12 Do they need workforce development? What is it? I
13 don't think we were clear from this hearing what
14 exactly that was.

15 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Well, I think it's all of
16 the above.

17 JOSEPH BELLO: It probably is.

18 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: There's a lot of issues.
19 Individuals have you know again, I can't just in
20 talking to an individual, I can't make a decision on
21 like, what does this person need. That's why I asked
22 about the counseling and how often it's twice a
23 month. We learned, I know Tim's saying that doesn't
24 happen.

25 TIMOTHY PENA: Sir, what happens -

1
2 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Could you use the mic?

3 TIMOTHY PENA: What happens with the mental
4 health and the counseling, you've got a veteran like
5 myself who comes in. I already have a VA regimen.
6 I'm already, I'm 70 percent for PTSD so I know what
7 it's like to have to work with your mental health.

8 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: When you were there for five
9 months, did you -

10 TIMOTHY PENA: What they're trying to do is push
11 you onto theirs.

12 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Okay, when you were there
13 for five months, did you get counseling?

14 TIMOTHY PENA: Not from them.

15 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Not from?

16 TIMOTHY PENA: I got mine from the VA where I'm
17 at now.

18 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Okay, so you didn't get it
19 from the shelter?

20 TIMOTHY PENA: This idea of bringing a veteran in
21 and then telling them oh, you need to tell us all of
22 - give us all the information, talk to us, all of
23 this, we're going to do this for you. We're going to
24 do that for you, then absolutely do nothing. At that
25

1
2 same time, you're taking the veteran away from their
3 VA benefits that they're supposed to be getting.

4 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Alright, okay, we got to
5 move on here.

6 TIMOTHY PENA: So, when they leave the shelter,
7 they have nothing. They have to start all over.

8 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Thank you. Alright, thanks
9 for that.

10 TIMOTHY PENA: Appreciate that.

11 RAUL RIVERA: Good afternoon. My name is Raul
12 Rivera, I'm a TLC driver and a TLC driver advocate.
13 We are here supporting our veterans. We thank the
14 Chair for all he does for veterans. We have plenty
15 of veterans in my family. I had a cousin who was
16 almost killed. He was in the Coast Guard; he was
17 shot and he survived. You know shoutout to Alex
18 Stein who is here too. We're happy to see him. You
19 know I'm here because we support our veterans but I'm
20 also here because you have two members on your
21 Committee who we are having trouble you know
22 communicating with you know? It's shameful that we
23 have to come to Committees and testify just to see
24 our Council Members, to get a meeting, to get a you
25 know you know the emails that go un-responded, you

1 know text messages go un-responded. It's not cool.
2 We're trying to get meetings with our members, you
3 know our Council Members and they're not responding
4 to us. You know I'm a Press Pass Card holder and I
5 was blocked. I was blocked at City Hall. I can't go
6 to press conferences. I'm being blocked by these
7 officers and they think it's cool. It's not cool.
8 You know they give you all kinds of excuses and they
9 block people from going and gathering content you
10 know. I have that right. I have the right to
11 advocate. I have the right to you know to use my
12 press pass. If I dishonor the press pass, I lose it
13 you know.

15 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: But Raul, could you talk
16 about veterans and homelessness?

17 RAUL RIVERA: Yeah, I could relate to
18 homelessness. I was homeless. I was homeless for a
19 long time and thanks to a veteran who is letting me
20 stay with him, I'm living in Brooklyn right now but
21 I'm from District 13 you know and I do work. I don't
22 have a nonprofit. I don't ask for money and when it
23 comes to the veterans, I could tell you something
24 about the veterans in Hudson Yards who reached out to
25 me because they know I'm vocal. They know I speak

1
2 up. They know I don't have fear and they've been
3 pushed out. They've been pushed out from Hudson
4 Yards.

5 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: You talking about the
6 vendors?

7 RAUL RIVERA: Yes. They've been pushed out.
8 That's disgusting that they've been pushed out.
9 Nobody spoke up for them and we reached out to
10 Botcher, who is the Council Member from the District.
11 We reached out to the Mayor. I know the Mayor
12 myself.

13 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Just if you could just give
14 me the locations of the vendors -

15 RAUL RIVERA: They already got pushed out.

16 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Yeah, but you tell me where
17 they wanted it and that's their corner or that's
18 their space?

19 RAUL RIVERA: Yeah.

20 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: If you can give me that
21 information, I'll talk to you after the hearing and
22 we could try to address that with the Police
23 Department and see if they go there. If they have
24 that location.

1
2 RAUL RIVERA: You know who gives them the hard
3 time is the Parks Department. It's the Parks
4 Department that has to be looked into. They are the
5 ones that are given them tickets. I can bring you a
6 vendor that's got 200 tickets. 200 tickets for a
7 veteran, that's insane.

8 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Yeah, okay that's something
9 we could also address. I'm on the Parks Committee;
10 we'll address it to the Commissioner.

11 RAUL RIVERA: Council Member, what happens if you
12 can't work? You become homeless.

13 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: I get it. I get it.

14 RAUL RIVERA: It's all connected.

15 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Thank you, thanks Raul.

16 RAUL RIVERA: Thank you. Thank you for the
17 letter.

18 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Thanks so much. Melissa
19 Ortiz, Melissa Del Valle Ortiz. This is our next
20 panel Sharon Brown, Alex Stein. Again, the topic is
21 homeless veterans. Melissa, you could start.

22 MELISSA DEL VALLE ORTIZ: Hi, thank you for
23 holding this hearing on homelessness and to the
24 Commissioner for his report. My name is Melissa Del
25 Valle Ortiz. I recently gave testimony in September

1
2 stating that I too was a homeless veteran with two
3 children until when I first came out in 1994 when I
4 came back to New York.

5 Homelessness among women veterans and there is a
6 study on it is at its highest. I have not heard any
7 conversation here about female veterans at all. I
8 think that it's something that we really need to look
9 at. Female veterans that typically stay living in
10 cars, they couch surf because they have women and
11 children with them. They typically are housed by
12 family members. We are not looking at those
13 statistics and I think that that is something that
14 City Council as well as the DVS really needs to look
15 at with respect to veterans. I have not heard the
16 word female veteran in this room.

17 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: No, no, you're right and
18 that's - I'll try to find out the numbers if we can
19 get that information and we'll get back at the next
20 hearing or even if you contact my office, we'll give
21 you that. That's important you know very good point.

22 MELISSA DEL VALLE ORTIZ: Thank you and then
23 lastly you talked about the lighting over at the
24 homeless -

25 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: At Borden yeah.

1
2 MELISSA DEL VALLE ORTIZ: At Borden. There are
3 also statistics that show that florescent lighting
4 causes depression and so, for veterans to be housed
5 and I have not been to this facility but for veterans
6 to be housed in a facility that has predominantly
7 overcast florescent lighting can very much effect
8 their quality of life. So, that is something that I
9 would like to also just let the general public know.
10 Thank you so much.

11 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Thank you and I turn off the
12 lighting in my office for that reason because I would
13 rather have the natural light. So, I think you're on
14 point on that one too. Thank you so much.

15 SHARON BROWN: Hello, my name is Sharon Brown.
16 I'm a member of Israel, defend Israel, release the
17 hostages, Let People Go. Thank you. Okay, the
18 veterans that are in the shelters, it should not be a
19 two year wait or any kind of wait. It should have
20 been like 30 days or something like that, whatever
21 their mandate is already but I don't think that the
22 shelter system should be for people who have served
23 the country. I think that homeless veterans from the
24 street to a house, from the street to an apartment.
25 We have the funds to put them in shelters for two

1 years. That means that we have sampled it. We
2 figured out, we have the money. So, now when we see
3 veterans that need apartments and houses, get them
4 from where they are, go to an apartment complex, go
5 to a computer, look up an apartment, get them into an
6 apartment ASAP. Divert the funds. We've diverted
7 funds before and it hasn't been a problem. Divert
8 the funds, put them directly into houses, get them
9 their own businesses. They can also do the street
10 vending and things like that but they can also own
11 bodegas and stores and different things like that.
12 They are not mentally incapacitated. They have
13 served this country. We need to treat them with
14 respect and the fact that they were able to take care
15 of this country, that lets us know that they are
16 fully capable and even now, if we had called them to
17 service, many of them might jump up and go back in
18 service to defend this nation.

19
20 And while the veterans were out on the streets
21 homeless, I want them paid for service. I don't want
22 them to be considered to have just been homeless.
23 When they were out there, our country was safe
24 because they were out there. They harassed them
25 while they were out there. They harassed them while

1
2 they were vending. Well, okay, good for you. So,
3 that means that they dealt with warfare, they dealt
4 with conflict. They were on duty. I want a bill or
5 something passed that they get paid for the time they
6 were homeless. If they were homeless for 20 years,
7 we better get into our wallets, we're going to pay
8 them for that as if they were active duty. If they
9 were homeless for ten years, the same thing, two
10 years, we need to pay them as if they served us when
11 they were out on the street. And again, I'm going to
12 reiterate. I want them to own property. They are
13 free. They don't need to be in transitional homes
14 and things like that. We need to pull off that
15 stigma. Anything that they need services, let them
16 go to it. Don't have any caps on their housing. Let
17 them be free. Let them have cars. We need to
18 purchase cars for them. We need to get them anything
19 they want and do it on our dime. They almost could
20 live free here on earth in America.

21 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Well, thank you Sharon for
22 that. Thank you.

23 SHARON BROWN: You're welcome.

24 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Thanks. Alex Stein.

25

1
2 ALEX STEIN: My name is Alex Stein. I just want
3 to say thank you to the Council for having this but
4 let's just be honest, I mean this is just an exercise
5 in some sort of weird virtue signal where you want to
6 act like you care about veterans but in reality, you
7 don't care about veterans.

8 We're sitting here, we're talking about
9 florescent lighting inside of a homeless shelter
10 right? But let's talk about the thousands of illegal
11 immigrants that get to live in Manhattan rent free
12 for months on end and not only that, when they get
13 the free food, we spend millions of dollars on the
14 food. And you know what they say? We don't like
15 this food. This food is not typical to what we had
16 in Venezuela. So you know what New York City is
17 going to do? New York City is going to go and we're
18 going to spend millions of dollars to give these
19 illegal immigrants gift cards while veterans are out
20 here literally freezing on the streets right now.

21 So, we're talking about a homeless shelter for
22 some veterans. If I say that I'm an Asylum seeker or
23 I'm a terrorist from Venezuela and I was a
24 Trindaruga (SP?) gang member and I said I'm coming
25 here to claim asylum because this is such a great

1 sanctuary city, you're going to give me a free hotel
2 in Manhattan. But a person that goes to Iraq and
3 defends our country against the actual Taliban, they
4 don't get any social services or if they do get
5 social services it's not a four star hotel in the
6 middle of Manhattan, Borden in the middle of
7 Manhattan at a four star establishment. I don't
8 think so. So, why do illegal immigrants in New York
9 City get better conditions than our veterans who go
10 out there and risk their lives for American citizens.
11 Not just do they risk their lives for New Yorkers,
12 they risk their lives for everybody in this country
13 and believe it or not these veterans risks their
14 lives for these illegal immigrants that get to take
15 advantage of New York Social Services.
16

17 So, you want to sit here and you want to act like
18 you want to help somebody. Why don't you do
19 something about all the people taking advantage of
20 this city, the hard working American citizens that
21 are struggling but you don't care about them. You'd
22 rather give an illegal immigrant that has a criminal
23 history longer than a damn CVS receipt, you'd rather
24 give him free room and board and a gift card to eat
25 at any New York establishment that he chooses. That

1 is wrong. New York City is the epicenter of culture.
2 New York leads the way of our country. So, the fact
3 that we have a country like this that is just
4 discarding these veterans and treating them as they
5 are less than a normal citizen. This city should be
6 ashamed of themselves. Mayor Adams should be ashamed
7 of himself. All the people on this Council should be
8 ashamed of themselves because you sit here and you
9 say, well, I don't know if I can get it passed. This
10 should be a bipartisan issue. You don't think that
11 veterans help out Republicans and Democrats? This is
12 common sense, so New York City doesn't have common
13 sense. Thank God Donald Trump got rid of that
14 congestion pricing. That has cost me hundreds of
15 dollars in Uber prices every time I visit the city,
16 so thank God that that is gone and help out our
17 veterans by kicking every illegal immigrant out of
18 the Roosevelt hotel except for the big booty Latinas
19 they can say if you a nine, you are fine.

21 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Thank you Alex and we have a
22 question for you.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER MARMORATO: I would actually like
24 to.

25 ALEX STEIN: For sure Kristy.

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER MARMORATO: First of all you
3 should really apologize, that was an inappropriate
4 comment.

5 ALEX STEIN: No, that's not inappropriate at all.
6 I can say -

7 UNIDENTIFIED: That's inappropriate.

8 ALEX STEIN: Okay yeah according to you. It's
9 the truth. I'm allowed to say booty so. I'm allowed
10 to say big booty and it's only because in a school
11 you could say booty. There's much more degrading
12 terms for a derriere than booty. So, you want to sit
13 there and act like I'm cussing because I said big
14 booty Latina. You need to wake up.

15 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Alright we don't want to go
16 back and forth. Wait, wait, wait, let me uh -

17 ALEX SMITH: No, you just sensitive.

18 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Alex, let her finish.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER MARMORATO: First of all, let me
20 tell you something. You need to do your research
21 okay. Check yourself okay. You should know your
22 role. You should know who you are speaking to. The
23 people in this Veterans Committee actually give a
24 shit.

25 ALEX SMITH: Oh really? Oh really?

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER MARMORATO: We just left the
3 [INAUDIBLE 02:06:10], okay.

4 ALEX SMITH: Then why did you kick them out then?
5 Why am I scared of getting robbed by a bunch of
6 illegal immigrants? So, you say you're doing
7 something -

8 COUNCIL MEMBER MARMORATO: You think we don't
9 have the same concerns.

10 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Alright, uh - cut the mic.
11 Yeah, yeah, yeah. Now, we're going to Zoom. One at
12 a time Jeanine Costley, Jeanine Costley.

13 JEANINE COSTLEY: Hi, good afternoon Council
14 Member Holden.

15 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Hi, go ahead. You have
16 three minutes. Thank you.

17 JEANINE COSTLEY: Thank you. Good afternoon
18 everyone and thank you for this opportunity to
19 testify. My name is Dr. Jeanine Costley, I'm the
20 Senior Vice President of Transitional Services at the
21 Institute for Community Living. ICL is one of the
22 largest providers of housing and behavioral health
23 services for children, adult and families. We serve
24 13,000 people annually through our 140 programs
25 across the five boroughs, including clinics,

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2 shelters, residences, and community based programs.
3 We currently serve 301 veterans through the funding
4 of the Department of Homeless Services and we also
5 obtain funding from the VA.

6 Thank you Chair Holden for your support of the
7 Borden Avenue Veterans Residents. New York's only
8 residents dedicated to serving veterans with
9 homelessness. Your leadership has helped us in so
10 many ways and it's really helped upgrade the facility
11 substantially. I'm here today to talk about the
12 city's concurrent mental health and homeless crisis,
13 particularly for our city's veterans and what needs
14 to be done to ensure that nonprofits like ICL
15 continue to get the help that's needed.

16 Ensuring that wellbeing is ensured with the
17 Department of Homeless Services, we need a lot of
18 different procedures and resources to help support
19 our work. ICL is committed to safeguarding and
20 protecting our veterans by providing a safe and
21 appropriate place for them to live. We're dedicated
22 to partnering with DHS and our community partners to
23 help make our shelter and veterans resources the best
24 that it can be.
25

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2 Many residents at the Borden Avenue Veteran
3 Shelter have seen combat and are living with the
4 trauma regarding their past experiences and their
5 past experiences with homelessness. We provide a
6 whole health support, which underscores everything we
7 do at ICL. It includes medication management,
8 nutrition, economic and job stability and ensuring
9 that we have stable and appropriate housing for our
10 veterans.

11 ICL has moved 223 veterans into affordable
12 housing and permanent housing in 2024 and year to
13 date in 2025, we have already housed 31 veterans.
14 Our newest supportive housing residents in Nevins
15 Apartments includes 20 unit for veterans but so much
16 more needs to be done and we would like to invest
17 more in housing for veterans to ensure their
18 stability, ensure their just their health and
19 wellbeing. Moreover, we need to revision the work
20 that we do in the shelter system. We're operating
21 within a framework where there has been little
22 increases and adjustments to reflect the growing
23 costs of food, insurance, and operational expenses.

24 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time has expired. Thank you.
25

1
2 JEANINE COSTLEY: And threatening to the lives of
3 nonprofit organizations, and we remain committed to
4 working with the Department of Homeless Services and
5 our partners to ensure that our veterans have housing
6 and support to rebuild their lives. And we look
7 forward to continuing working with the city and with
8 the Council to help our veterans and to ensure their
9 stability and housing.

10 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Thank you Jeanine. By the
11 way Jeanine, I visited the downtown Brooklyn
12 facility. It's a wonderful facility and we met
13 several veterans that spoke about how great it is
14 there. So, we'd love to expand that and uh -

15 JEANINE COSTLEY: We would love to do that
16 Council Member.

17 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Yeah and if you could just
18 comment. Do you know anything about the roof at
19 Borden that you're dealing with? Where are we with
20 that and what has been the city's response?

21 JEANINE COSTLEY: So, uhm the building, it's a
22 very old building and there's you know there's been
23 some repairs that need to be done for a pretty long
24 period of time. We've been working with the
25 Department of Homeless Services and the Department of

1
2 Buildings regarding the repairs that are needed
3 there. The facilities department has come out and
4 they've done repairs over the years. A lot of patch
5 work and a lot of fixing parts of the roof and the
6 skylights at Borden but it is a capital project and
7 we're working closely with our partners at DHS to
8 ensure that it gets done. It's - right now it's on a
9 plan that it will get done sometime between now and
10 the end of 2025. So, we're working with them
11 closely.

12 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Alright, so there's light at
13 the tunnel? So, if they say the end of this year -

14 JEANINE COSTLEY: We're hoping that at the end of
15 this year, we'll be able to do as much as we can for
16 the roof and so, I would be happy to report back on
17 that and I'll be talking to DHS more about that but
18 every year, we get new information and so the
19 information now is by the end of 2025 that it will be
20 fixed.

21 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Thank you so much Jeanine
22 for that and thank you again for all the work ICL
23 does. Thank you.

24 JEANINE COSTLEY: Thank you.

25

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2 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: We can't have talk from the
3 audience here. Next witness is Ariane Ling.

4 ARIANE LING: Hi, good afternoon everyone, Chair
5 Holden, members of the Committee on veterans. Can
6 you hear and see me okay?

7 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Yup we can hear you loud and
8 clear.

9 ARIANE LING: Okay great thank you. So, my name
10 is Dr. Ariane Ling, I'm a Clinical Psychologist and
11 the Associate Director of the Military Family Center
12 at NYU Langone Health. I'm here to testify today on
13 behalf of the Military Family Center and to support
14 Intro. Number 1171. Our center was established just
15 over 11 years ago to fill a well-documented gap in
16 services available to veterans and their families.
17 The MFC provides free mental health treatment to
18 veterans and their families who are experiencing the
19 long term effects of all phases of military service.
20 And these services include evaluation and treatment
21 of mental health disorders, cooccurring substance use
22 and the effects of traumatic brain injuries. And
23 sine its inception, our center has served over 4,000
24 veterans and their family members. We've developed
25 strong partnerships with the VA and the Department of

1
2 Veteran Services and many other organizations to
3 reach veterans who are ineligible for care elsewhere
4 or maybe disconnected from mental health services.

5 The sheer number of individuals that our clinic
6 has been able to serve demonstrates the necessity for
7 public and private partnerships and to meet the needs
8 of the veterans and families in our community. And
9 it is central to the mission of our clinic to
10 decrease barriers to high quality evidence based care
11 for our nations military families and we offer gold
12 standard treatments and therapies for our post-
13 traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, depression and
14 substance use disorders and these treatments include
15 prolonged exposure therapy, cognitive processing
16 therapy and cognitive behavioral therapy.

17 And we also tailor treatment to each veterans
18 unique needs and pride ourselves on staying up to
19 date with new and emerging treatments to give our
20 population the very best care available. And this
21 includes most recently the addition of written
22 exposure therapy. It's a short term highly
23 accessible exposure based treatment for trauma and
24 stress related disorders.

1
2 So, Intro. 1171 proposed by Chair Holden is
3 critical legislation that supports research and
4 innovation on PTSD treatment and other psychological
5 disorders. I believe this is key in advancing our
6 understanding and improving care for veterans. And
7 while I'm not specifically familiar with
8 reconsolidation of traumatic memories therapy and you
9 know can't speak to its effectiveness or recommend it
10 at this time, we can and want to advocate for ongoing
11 research and development of PTSD treatments.

12 So, if enacted, this legislation would provide
13 essential insight to whether RTM therapy could be an
14 effective to our existing repertoire PTSD treatments
15 as PTSD remains a significant public health challenge
16 for our veteran community and any opportunity to
17 explore new evidence based interventions should be
18 met with consideration.

19 So, our center is equipped to working together
20 with the community to address our ever growing need
21 for our veterans and their families. We hope that
22 the Council will further invest.

23 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Thank you. Your time is
24 expired.

25

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2 ARIANE LING: In this research. So, thank you so
3 much.

4 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Thank you Dr. Ling and thank
5 you for all the great work you do at NYU. We'd love
6 to expand that too and there's no more waiting list
7 or do you still have a waiting list for veterans?

8 ARIANE LING: We have a brief waiting list for
9 couples therapy but we are really doing our best to
10 meet everybody, so the waitlist is not that long
11 right now.

12 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Yes and by the way RTM it
13 has shown some very, very good outcomes so I will you
14 know connect you with Dr. Burk who came up with this
15 about 20 years ago.

16 ARIANE LING: Fantastic.

17 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: And has been an advocate and
18 it's really it can help veterans. What we've seen so
19 far as little as five sessions and it's quite
20 innovative. So, yes, thank you so much doctor and
21 appreciate your testimony.

22 ARIANE LING: Thank you. Thank you so much.

23 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Our next panelist is Michael
24 Moreno. Michael.

25 MICHAEL MORENO: Hello?

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2 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Yup.

3 MICHAEL MORENO: Well great to be here. Thank
4 you all for giving me so much information you know.
5 I'm a Vietnam Veteran Combat. I'm a grunt and I'm
6 also the Vice President of Vietnam Veterans for
7 America in Chapter 126 for Manhattan but we reach all
8 over. I'm pleased to say that we have been working
9 with the veteran services, the director of launcher
10 services at the New York Veterans Hospital and we
11 opened what's called Homeless Veterans Essential
12 Needs Shop. Okay, we fill he place with clothing
13 that will be either purchased, which we purchase
14 thermal underwear because it's so cold out there. I
15 don't want to underwear, thermal clothing, coats,
16 scarves, jackets, and we've stocked up a room with a
17 lot of stuff. And homeless veterans come to the
18 hospital for treatment, for their medications, they
19 are asked if they need clothing and they go walk to
20 the shop. They go to a ward on the 15th floor.

21 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Michael, are you there? We
22 lost you. Do we have him still? No, we'll come
23 back. Michael, can you hear us? You got to unmute.
24 Alright, we'll move on until we can reconnect with
25 Michael. Dierdre Rice-Reese. Dierdre.

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DIERDRE RICE-REESE: I'm here. Good afternoon.

CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Yes, okay. Yeah, we can hear you.

DIERDRE RICE-REESE: Okay, good afternoon Chair Holden and esteemed members of the Veterans Committee. My name is Dierdre Rice-Reese. Nice to be here again. I'm honored to speak on behalf of Samaritan Daytop Village. Many of you know what Samaritan does but I'll speak briefly about it as it relates to homelessness. I want to commend the Committee for its commitment to addressing the full range of challenges faced by homeless veterans. Your focus on housing wraparound supports, mental health resources is essential.

Despite the tremendous progress in reducing veteran homelessness over the past decade, New York City saw one of the highest single year increases in veteran homelessness in 2024, signals an urgent need to address not this housing but also root causes of instability including mental health challenges, substance use disorders and economic hardship.

Unlike many organizations, we would manage clients that had other than honorable discharges and not for anything other than the fact that they need the help

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2 and they did serve regardless of their character at
3 discharge. Samaritan we see first hand the barriers
4 of veterans every day. Veteran specific programs
5 survived residents of treatment for veterans
6 struggling with PTSD, addiction, trauma. We work
7 with NYU Langone. We work with DVS. We work with
8 other community partners to make sure that we reach
9 them. We also had the first ever exclusively female
10 veteran program. We do job training and employment
11 readiness, including resume writing, interview
12 techniques and internships, basic needs assistance,
13 clothes, shoes, digital access to ensure that our
14 veterans successfully engage in job searches and
15 remote services.

16 We advocate for discharge upgrades. That's a big
17 one. Many veterans with less than honorable
18 discharge are locked out of VA benefits and they
19 might have been discharged because of their mental
20 health or substance use issues despite having any
21 service related injury or mental health condition,
22 they're locked out of the VA. We still have to
23 address their needs. Opening this changes lives.

24 Hearing the SQUARES conversation from the
25 Commissioner from DVS. How are you Commissioner

1
2 Hendon? It really enlightened me around how we can
3 reach out to other veterans. As an air force veteran
4 and someone in long term recovery for more than 30
5 years, I can personally attest to life changing
6 impacts of veteran specific services. We definitely
7 need them. We always need support in continuing our
8 efforts, using an approach that is distinct to
9 veterans that is different from what is civilian
10 supports. It makes a big difference.

11 While serving is a privilege, it's also a
12 sacrifice that deserves recognition and not just in
13 words.

14 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Thank you. Your time is
15 expired.

16 DIERDRE RICE-REESE: I appreciate the people,
17 thank you for the words but a sustained investment by
18 building a culture recovery supporting veterans,
19 pride in service, expanding resources, we can
20 continue to transform lives. Thank you for your
21 time, your leadership, your commitment to New York
22 Veterans. Samaritan stands as a ready to partner
23 with you, continue our partnership in this mission.

24 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Thank you Dierdre and thank
25 you for your service and thanks for all the great

1
2 work you do on behalf of our veterans. So, you're an
3 amazing group there and certainly you're a good
4 spokesperson for Samaritan. Thank you.

5 DIERDRE RICE-REESE: Good seeing you again sir.

6 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Nice seeing you. So, we're
7 trying to reconnect with Michael Moreno. Michael.
8 Yeah, he's not on. Last call for Joseph Hoff. Oh,
9 Michael is back. Michael we have you back? Can you
10 unmute yourself Michael? Okay, Michael, we can't
11 hear you so we're going to move on. Joseph Hoff,
12 last call. Gordan Lee, last call. I think that's it
13 so Michael, I'm sorry. If you can contact my office,
14 we can get the rest of your testimony. Somehow
15 there's technical difficulties so. So, seeing nobody
16 else, I'm going to adjourn this hearing [GAVEL].
17 Thank you so much.

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C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date February 25, 2025